



The Circus Rider's Daughter

"God's flowers bloom
in any soil"

THE CIRCUS-RIDER'S
DAUGHTER.

JUST PUBLISHED.

THE OUTLAW OF CAMARGUE

By A. de Lamothe. Translated by Anna T. Sadlier.

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The story opens with a charming picture of Provençal manners toward the end of the last century, showing the simple happy life of the people, their daily pursuits, their loves, their sports, the reverence of the tenant for the feudal lord, and the unaffected piety of peasant and peer.

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THE

CIRCUS-RIDER'S DAUGHTER.

TRANSLATED BY

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M.C.

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THE CIRCUS-RIDER'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

ON a sofa in one of the most elegant apartments in the "Imperial Hotel" at Geneva a young woman reclined who, although not strictly beautiful, presented a charming picture as she lay there, her head enveloped in a black lace veil, from which her flaxen locks fell in heavy masses on the scarlet cushion, while her hands gracefully rested in her lap.

Everything about her seemed so frail that involuntarily one shrank from such delicacy, which, with persons as with things, seems, alas ! to bloom only to die.

Her extreme quiet was evidently compulsory from weakness, for at the slightest noise her quick gaze wandered impatiently to a small travelling clock which stood on the table near the sofa. As the hands of the time-piece gradually advanced she could no longer repress her restlessness, and, half rising, she called to an old woman whose stout figure was often visible passing the door. "Annie," and, notwithstanding the effort she made, the voice was hardly audible—"Annie, is Miss Nora not yet returned?"

"The little miss is still with the master," replied the

woman in a broken accent, which, together with her bronzed complexion and marked countenance, betrayed her foreign origin. "Little miss is safe with the master ; missus need not be uneasy. She come when it be time ; master never come home before seven."

"He must have taken her there again," whispered the young woman to herself. "Oh, he knows not what he does. I must speak to him. My poor child ! My poor child !"

Either the talking or the agitation brought on a violent, dry cough, which so overcame her that her head fell back wearily.

"Why *will* missus distress herself for nothing ?" said the old servant querulously. "Missus make herself sick, and master will then be angry ; when missus was young she was mild and patient, but now she be like the fire-flame."

"Then I had no one to care for, old Annie. Mamma and you took care of me ; and then, too, I was in good health," she added with a sigh.

"You could be in good health now, too, if you would," muttered the old woman ; "but this unquiet life wears you out."

"No, no, it is not the life—I am so tenderly cared for. It lies here," and she pressed her hand to her heart. "Something is wrong here. But listen—here they are, Annie."

Quick, light steps were heard, and in the next moment the door was thrown open and a little girl bounded into the room and threw herself impetuously on the invalid.

"Mamma, mamma," she cried, "I can do it beautifully. I can ride standing like Fräulein Elisa, and spring through the hoop."

"How heated you are, my darling!" said the mother, as she stroked the girl's black hair back from her forehead. "Oh, Alfred, you took her again!" she said reproachfully to a tall, large man who followed the child.

"How do you feel, my love?" said he, bending over her to press a kiss upon her forehead, regardless of the reproachful tone.

"Oh, Alfred!" she repeated, and looked at him with tearful eyes.

He shrugged his shoulders and walked impatiently to a window, but the little one drew down her mother's face and continued to repeat, "Oh, mamma, listen to me; I rode standing, and jumped through the hoop much better than the little Wimbledon, who very nearly fell."

"You must change your dress, Nora," interrupted the father. "Go with Annie and let her assist you."

"Presently, papa. But listen to me, mamma; just as we came into the ring papa put me on the new pony."

"Helena, how can you be so foolish as to keep the child?" said the man, returning. "Nora, I tell you once more go dress for dinner."

"Go, darling; you can tell me later," said the mother.

The little one, frightened by the unaccustomed severity of her father's tone, left the room.

The invalid lay quietly back and the man remained silently standing by the window.

"Alfred," said the woman weakly after a pause, and

she stretched toward him her hand, which he took and raised to his lips, saying, "Shall we be friends?" and his dark eyes shone with a mischievous good humor.

"Oh, come to me; it is so long since I have had a chance to be alone with you," she replied tenderly, as she clung to him.

He drew a chair close to her couch, and sitting upon it, placed his arm around her so that her head could rest upon his shoulder. "Now for a sermon," said he half jestingly. "Now I cannot escape; and I see in your eye the question, Why do you take Nora with you?"

"You have read aright. Yes; why have you done it when I besought you not to?"

"Why? You women are dreadful with your *whys*. Now, simply because I could not help it. The child has remarkable talent—as graceful as a young fairy, as brave as a man. Why should I not have the gratification of bringing my child up to my own profession? She will be a circus-rider of the first rank," said he enthusiastically.

"My daughter a circus-rider!" murmured Helena in agony.

"Helena, you married a circus-rider."

"Oh, that is different. A man may elevate his business. Adverse circumstances forced your choice, and you, my husband, have converted a light amusement into an art." Her eyes turned to him proudly.

"Adverse circumstances drove me. Yes, but who knows if any other calling would have been so successful for me as this free, independent one has been?"

"Formerly you thought differently," she suggested timidly.

"Formerly !" he repeated. "Do you mean when I wooed you, when the future was uncertain, when the wounds of the past were reopened and showed at its brightest what I had lost ? Then was my calling hateful to me," said he, covering his eyes with his hand, as if to shut out a terrible picture. "But," he continued, "that is now forgotten."

She looked up at him hesitatingly, and said : "Alfred, what drove you to adopt this extraordinary calling ?"

"*Extraordinary calling !*" he repeated with bitterness. "You put it as gently as possible. Well, principally, perhaps, my nature. You must have inherited very little of Eve's inquisitiveness, little wife ; you have inquired so seldom into my past. Were you afraid ?"

"No ; love cannot exist with mistrust. The past was yours ; the present and the future mine, and they are sufficient." There was something touchingly confiding in her tone.

"My sweet wife," said he, as he kissed her forehead and drew her more closely to him. "Helena, it were better that I remained silent ; but though my life has had many dark hours, it has no stain, no disappointed hopes, as is often the case in a struggling life. You know that the name I bear is not rightfully my own. My father was descended from an old and noble French family. Restless blood coursed in his veins ; he was one of the few among the aristocracy who joined in the revolution, and in consequence he was obliged to quit

his native land, and resided a long time in Germany, where he married. In one of the last battles he died, and left my mother penniless with three children. My remembrance of my parents' home is not happy. The contrasts were too strong, the dispositions too different, and circumstances contributed to increase the unfavorable impression made on me. My mother's relatives, who were in high military and State positions, seeing that I had a taste for the army, used their influence to obtain my admission into a military school. Toward my mother I had become most impetuous. What she had overlooked in the father shocked her in the son. Her passive nature could not understand me. It seems a strange contradiction that the French characteristics in an individual have a fascination for the Germans, who hate the French nation. My name, my foreign appearance, and my lively nature won me friends in school, and I shone brilliantly among my more apathetic companions; while my quick talent, my agility, and my easily excited ambition made me the darling of my teachers. Unfortunately they called my wild pranks humor, which made my vanity grow apace, and I prided myself on my French extraction too much.

“Had the time been one of activity I might have achieved something, but it was a peaceful year, and the formal duties of a small garrison, together with the pittance of a lieutenant without private means, little tallied with my visions of military glory. Now I appreciate the use of formal discipline, but then it was but idle play to me, and I fretted under the restraint.

“ However, I had no choice ; my path in life seemed to lead to this career. My immediate superior may have been more punctilious than was necessary, and, old follower of the war of independence as he was, he hated what he considered my French vanity. He lost no opportunity to make me feel his importance. This state of things developed in me faults of my double nationality.”

“ But you have also the virtues of both nations ; you have the German spirit,” interrupted Helena lovingly.

“ At all events, German obstinacy,” he continued. “ A severe reprimand, which I considered unjust, brought about the long-expected break. I thought myself insulted, and I demanded an explanation from my superior, which he declined to give on military grounds, and my violence knew no bounds and brought on me a severe punishment. Nothing remained for me but to take the first opportunity to insult him in private life, so as to force him to ask satisfaction of me. We fought, and my ball was so well aimed that he died that night from the wound I gave him. The laws against duelling were so severe that it was impossible for me to remain in the country, much less in the army. My friends assisted me to escape, and I wandered to the New World.

“ At first a feeling of recovered freedom took possession of me. I was young and gay, and a new land was open to me, but the stern reality soon made itself felt, and I saw myself with nothing but my own exertions to depend upon. My education and tastes prompted me

to seek a respectable situation, but I could find nothing for which I was fitted. For some positions I was too highly educated, while for others I was not practical enough. *This is the stuff that makes the adventurer.* While I found it hard to wring a living out of the lowest avocations, accident made me acquainted with a set of hunters who lived by the chase and training wild horses. This suited my restless nature, and I joined my lot to that of these rough fellows. My superiority in shooting and riding soon impressed them, and in the management of wild horses I showed from the beginning my mastery over animals. I learned from my companions, who had carried on the business a long time; more from the Indians, with whom we often traded in our excursions on the prairies. Many an equestrian feat by which I now gain the applause of the public was taught me by the red man.

“In this manner I spent many years, and in the wilderness difference of position is soon lost sight of. One year, however, hunting had become dangerous on account of the war between unfriendly tribes, so it occurred to one of our company (who was a real Yankee in resources) to exhibit our trained horses, an idea born of accident and discouragement and lack of employment. Nothing better offered, so we gladly adopted the suggestion; and as the first experiment in a small town succeeded so much better than we could have anticipated, we determined to follow it up. Our exhibitions, though of the most primitive nature, were entirely new. My recollections of similar amusements

in the old country were of great use to us, and the training and beauty of the horses, as well as the reckless daring of the men, pleased the people, who marvelled at our ingenuity.

“ We travelled from State to State, earning money and renown. You know that when the American's curiosity is awakened he will spare no trouble to gratify it. As long as we remained in small places I found nothing very unpleasant in my position. The experience of the last few years had hardened me ; but when I came face to face with those to whose circles I had once belonged a feeling awoke in me which I could not overcome. Particularly bitter seemed my fate the first evening your sweet face in the audience made me realize how far my avocation had removed me from the charms of woman's society. That hour showed me all that I had lost in the treasures which I once possessed in name and standing, and which circumstances had now closed to me. We only learn to value a thing when it is lost to us forever. I was inexpressibly unhappy.

“ It was the custom there as it is here for the young people of fashion to visit the circus in the forenoon, and it was in this way that I made the acquaintance of your brother, whose resemblance to you attracted me to him. The purchase of a horse brought us together. He recognized the man of education in me, and was very friendly, while to me it was an indescribable happiness to meet one of my own rank in early life.

“ Change of circumstances is too common a thing in America not to meet with indulgence, so when your

brother learned my history he became a true friend. Through my now large income I was able to sustain myself in the social circle into which he introduced me. There I met you, Helena, and, thanks to American independence, I was able to approach you. What followed you know, sweetheart. You returned my love bravely. Your faith in him raised the disheartened man in his own estimation. Your parents saw in me only the adventurer, the man of questionable calling. In order to prove myself worthy of your confidence I resolved to bring my business to the highest perfection in its way. My companions had long admitted that I was the mainspring of the enterprise, that it was my mind which directed it, so it was an easy matter to manage them and to carry out my plans. As manager of the circus I felt secure of the future, and knew what I could do, and, Helena, I have done it. Have we not been happy?" A look of the deepest tenderness accompanied the question.

"Almost too happy," she replied, clinging to him closely.

"No, no, not too happy. I set sail at full tide, and am not disappointed with the anchorage. My restless blood and northern heart have both been satisfied, and out of a wandering life I have wrung a peaceful happiness. Now, little wife, do not borrow trouble. Will you not trust me to guide the bark which I launched?" He spoke with the self-possession of a man who owed everything to his own exertions.

"Nora!" said the wife after a pause, and turning

her eyes away from him. A cloud swept across his face as he said hastily :

“ You women are dreadfully obstinate, always returning to the same thing. What about the child ? ”

“ Alfred, you foster this taste in her too much.”

In spite of himself he laughed as he said : “ Wait ten years or so until the predilection becomes dangerous ; in the mean time let her love the noble animals that have brought fortune and renown to her father. I have already told you that she inherits the taste. I cannot be persuaded otherwise. Let me train her. In my hands she will earn more applause than with any other instructor. Although it is, as you say, *a strange calling*, you see it is not devoid of happiness.”

“ Alfred, you cannot mean it ! ” she shrieked, and suddenly raised herself up. “ You cannot doom my daughter, your child, to such a fate ! Was it for this that you told me the story of your life ? Life is not the same thing for man and for woman. I have already tried to make you understand this ; the latter is bound to the place she first selects, and think what a fate this—to be gazed at by an unsympathetic public, to-day its plaything, to-morrow its jibe ! I am sick and weak, but I will save my child.”

Such a look of daring resolution lit up her soft blue eyes that Karsten shrank back involuntarily and cried out, “ Helena, you are raving. From what will you save the child ? Of what danger are you dreaming ? She is under your protection. Teach her to be as good and sweet as you are, and let us await the future.”

"Under my protection, you say?" There was something unearthly in the tone of her voice as she wrung her thin, white hands. "Teach her to be good and sweet? Oh, no; not so, not so. If you choose this career for her, take her away. Let her mix with those who are to live that life, so that her feelings may be blunted and she may never know what a woman should know, nor have higher aspirations than to win a paper wreath and the shouted applause of the gaping crowd!"

"You are bitter," he moaned, springing to his feet. "What has come over you, my gentle wife?"

"A mother's fear, the terror of a mother about to lose her child. Alfred, Alfred!" she cried in a weak, supplicating tone, "come here. Listen to what I have thought in those long, sleepless nights when Nora's future passed before me. Oh, my husband, listen!"

He went to her side, and kneeling before her, with his hand on her cold, moist brow, said: "You agitate yourself, love. Be quiet now, and let us speak of this another time."

"No, not another time—to-day. It would grow only all the harder." The sick woman threw her arm around her husband's neck and continued, while her eye beamed with all the magic of the maiden's glance pleading with her lover. "Listen to me, Alfred. I had so sweet a dream. You are now rich. You have gained wealth and renown in your calling. Man must not stretch Fortune's cord too tightly. Let it go. Do not venture farther. Return to my home. If it pleases you pur-

chase it, and secure for yourself and your child a happy future among congenial surroundings."

He looked at her puzzled and astonished, for he never anticipated such a proposition ; then he said sorrowfully, " You consider your child's happiness more than your husband's."

" Oh, no ; your happiness, too." She ran her soft hand through his thick, dark hair. " Your happiness, too. A hundred chances may rob you of all you have. And I believe, too, that I am homesick. Perhaps I might get well," she added, but her lowered gaze contradicted what her lips expressed. She remained silent like one awaiting sentence.

Slowly Karsten released himself from her arms and paced the room, buried in deep thought ; then, standing before her, he said :

" You have only considered the child, not yourself, for you have never wished to go back, Helena. I cannot, I cannot. What was once hard has become the pleasure, the pride of my life. I cannot become a cultivator of the soil, much less rust in leisure. But be satisfied," he continued, as he saw a deathly pallor spread over her countenance. " Sacrifice for sacrifice ! Take your child ; leave me my avocation. This is a sacrifice for me. Bring her up in woman's ways if the mad-cap will allow it. Possibly I could not protect the daughter as I did the mother. I promise you never to bring her in contact with my business. I promise you never to interfere with her education and always to support your opinions sacredly. Are you satisfied, little wife ?"

He bent affectionately over her as she lay exhausted on the cushions. She remained silent, her lids tightly closed and her hands pressed convulsively together. He repeated, "Are you contented? When Nora is grown, the money which her father's *strange calling* has amassed will enable her to live in luxury. You see I have looked even to the very end, and now let me gaze into your blue eyes that have won so much."

Perhaps she thought she had not won so much. How much more had she hoped for? Her husband's voice had always possessed a singular charm for her, and exercised a powerful influence over her since the first time she had heard it. To-day it lost none of its strength. He kissed those beautiful eyes, in which he read only tranquillity. He whispered all those loving assurances so dear to a wife's heart. She was not satisfied with his plan, in which she saw much that was vain and impracticable, but she had gained something for her child.

As often occurs to feeble persons, her violent agitation was followed suddenly by extreme exhaustion. Karsten observed this, and lifting her tenderly from the cushions, laid her on her bed and prepared to go out, for he had much to do.

"I shall take Nora to dinner with me," he said, "that you may rest; in the afternoon you can have her all to yourself."

She seemed not to hear him; so telling the maid to be careful of her mistress, and calling his little girl, he left the apartment very quietly.

Helena was alone. The dreamy quiet in which she

lay could not be called sleep, for she was quite conscious, and as soon as the spell of Alfred's voice and presence was removed all her fears came back with redoubled force.

"Mother, mother," she cried aloud, "take back that word that I would repent of what I was doing! I have been so happy. It is only the child." Hastily, as if seeking peace, she pressed a little cross to her lips.

Helena was the daughter of Irish parents, who when she was but a child emigrated to America, taking with them considerable means. Something in the light-hearted passion of her nation had attracted the pious, strictly brought-up girl to the handsome adventurer. After a struggle her parents gave their permission to the marriage, on condition that she should be always kept from contact with the members of the circus company.

Karsten was faithful to these conditions, and the lovely bride possessed in an eminent degree all the charms peculiar to the daughters of Erin, and was the precious jewel of her husband's fiery heart. He loved Helena with a devotion unusual in one of so restless a disposition. His wife was to him like an echo from his early life, and filled the void which he felt in his present position. Shortly after their marriage they went to Europe, where he had wonderful success, and soon held acknowledged precedence in his profession. His distinguished appearance and his early education secured him a certain toleration among the better classes in the principal cities, where his coming was hailed with gen-

eral enthusiasm. He surrounded his wife with all the comfort and luxury which his continually increasing income could well afford, and she never missed society, for she lived in her love for her husband and child, and had sufficient variety in their wandering life.

The first shadow that fell across their path of happiness was Helena's delicacy, which followed the birth of their second child, who died in infancy. Alfred seemed unconscious of the progress of her malady, or perhaps he tried to deceive himself, fearing to think of the result. She, however, was not so hopeful, and this naturally increased her solicitude for the future of her child.

She was not satisfied with the last conversation with her husband, for both offered to make a sacrifice which each felt would be vain.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER leaving his wife Karsten entered the dining-room holding his little girl by the hand. It was in the height of the travelling season, and the large room was filled with guests of all ranks, but every eye was turned on the commanding-looking man and the beautiful child at his side.

Nora, now seven years old, was a remarkable-looking child. The easy, independent pose, the regular features, arched brows and dark hair, which she inherited from her father, with the fair complexion and blue eyes of her mother, made a striking combination. Her dress was white, and its English style left the neck and arms entirely free. Her dark hair fell in long curls down her back. She moved down the crowded room with quiet composure, and as her father placed her near him in a seat which some gentlemen of his acquaintance had reserved for him, she received the little jests and compliments which are generally bestowed on an attractive child with the condescension of a princess and the indifference of long habit.

The conversation soon wandered to the immediate affairs of the director, whose experience and extensive travels gave them peculiar interest ; but notwithstanding Nora's love for her father's wonderful animals, the particulars discussed soon went beyond her childish

understanding, and her gaze wandered through the room. Suddenly her eyes brightened; newly arrived guests were entering, and the presence of some children about her own age among them awakened her interest.

|| Youth is always attracted by youth.

To Nora's delight the strangers were placed near her. A distinguished-looking woman led by the hand a little girl some years younger than Nora, and clad in deep mourning. Two boys followed with a tutor, whose black dress bespoke his clerical character. The lady and the little girl sat at one side of the table, and the tutor and the boys took seats which made the older of the latter Nora's immediate neighbor. Boy-like, he did not notice her, and seemed exclusively occupied with his meal. The lady, however, looked at the little one, whose earnest eyes betrayed how much she would like to wile away time by chatting.

Nora could no longer control her impatience, and with the freemasonry that brings the untutored together, she addressed her neighbor with the child's question, "What is your name?" The boy looked astonished, but his thirteen-years'-old dignity was soon under the spell of the pretty speaker, and they entered into conversation. The lady and the clergyman too joined, interested by the winning ways of the little girl, who told them of her sick mamma and of her travels. She was quite at home in many of the European languages. After a while her father made her a sign to follow him. Being so interested in the conversation of his friends, he had not noticed the entrance of the strangers.

Nora left her new friends with her own winsome grace, and they were so much struck with Alfred's appearance, that the lady inquired of the waiter, who had bowed to the director with that deference always begotten either by position or feeling, "Who was that gentleman with the beautiful child?"

"That is Karsten, the renowned circus director," whispered the man subserviently, and following the questioning look of the lady.

"The circus director!" repeated the lady incredulously, and with a look of disappointment.

"Certainly, your ladyship. His is the world-renowned circus, and the child is his little daughter. They have been here for some time, and his wife is very sick. In a few days the circus will open," continued the waiter.

"Oh, Karsten, Karsten, mamma!" exclaimed both the boys. "We must see him, he has such beautiful horses. Mamma, you surely will let us go?"

All was still in Helena's room. She had eaten nothing for several hours, and remained perfectly motionless on her couch. The excitement of the morning seemed to have exhausted her. No word passed her lips, but the short, dry cough returned from time to time.

The maid, hoping that her mistress slept, prevented the child going into the room, so the little thing followed her advice and went into the hall to play, hoping to meet her new acquaintances; and she was not disappointed. Looking dreamily over the balustrade down into the lower hall, where a crowd of people were talk-

ing, she saw the clergyman with his young charges coming up the stairs.

"All alone and so quiet?" said the priest to her kindly.

"Papa is gone out, and mamma is asleep, and Annie is cross," was the reply.

"Three unfortunate things for you ; and so you are lonely," continued the chaplain with a smile.

"I thought you might come, for I heard your little girl crying in there," said Nora, as she pointed to a door.

"Yes, Lily is there with mamma," answered the elder boy, bending his long legs so as to touch her shoulder with his hand. "Come in with us."

"I must not go with strangers, mamma has always forbidden it, but I can play here," she said longingly.

"Well, we will play with you. You have no objection, have you?" said the boy, addressing the priest.

The clergyman nodded consent ; the child interested him deeply.

"What can you play? Can you jump the rope?" said the boy, noticing the skipping-rope, which she had brought from her room, thinking the hall a good place to use it.

"Can I?" she said disdainfully. "Much better than you think, if you will only turn it."

The boy complied with the suggestion. The little girl threw back her dark hair, raised her arms, lifted herself on her toes, and danced and turned under and over the quickly moving rope with the grace of a fairy.

The loud applause of the boys suddenly stopped her, and she said, "I learned that from Fräulein Emily, but I should not have done it; mamma cannot bear that I should do so before strangers." She sat down embarrassed and grieved.

"Why cannot your mamma bear it?" said the chaplain with increasing interest.

"Mamma says it is not nice to let one's self be seen so; she is not pleased when I ride either."

"Does your mamma ride?" he pursued.

"My mamma ride!" cried the child, with an indescribably haughty air, and throwing her little head high in the air. "My papa's people do that for money."

"But can you ride well?" asked the boys in surprise.

"Of course I ride, and drive, too," she answered with a shrug of the shoulders. "I have four ponies which are mine alone. You can see them when you go to the circus. The little Wimbledon goes to the post with them. I lent them to her for this purpose, but I can drive them better myself."

The boys opened their eyes wide with astonishment as they said, "Can you really, really drive?"

"Yes, six-in-hand," she replied firmly. "This spring I drove my ponies entirely alone in the presence of the Emperor in St. Petersburg. He would not believe papa that I could, so, after much coaxing, mamma allowed me to show him. I am not quite sure what the Emperor said." She sat down quietly, but with an air which showed plainly that she would like to be questioned.

"Oh, what did he say?" inquired the listeners.

"First he took me in his arms and kissed me and gave me this," showing a heart set with diamonds which she wore suspended from her neck; "but you must not laugh," she added, as she turned to Curt, the eldest boy, whose mouth showed a suspicious expression.

"What else did the Emperor say?" persisted the latter.

"He said—he said, 'Karsten, she will yet throw others in the shade and make the world talk.' Now you may laugh," she added, as she sat down with such a vexed expression that the priest could not suppress a smile.

Curt, however, turned a deep red at her words and said decidedly, "I am not laughing. Your mamma is quite right; it is not pretty for a young lady to exhibit herself so. I would be very sorry to hear you spoken of as a circus-rider, and it would be a great misfortune for you."

The boy spoke hastily, but the girl looked at him confusedly, a look of mortification overspreading her face. He quickly perceived it, and was pained. Kneeling before her, he stroked her hair back from her forehead and said affectionately, "Now do not be angry with me; you will not be a circus-rider, will you? But have you learned nothing else but to ride and drive?"

"Oh, ever so much more," quickly replied the girl. "Every day I have lessons with mamma, besides other teachers. I can read and write in three languages, and

"I also know my catechism." She said this latter with a look at the chaplain, as if she knew that he would approve particularly of this last accomplishment.

"Who instructed you in that?" asked the priest, answering her look.

"Mamma, every day, and I have also been to confession. You are a priest; I knew that at once."

"Indeed; how did you discover that?"

"Oh, I know many priests. Whenever we arrive in a city where we are to remain long mamma always takes me to see them to be examined. My mamma is very pious; she goes to church every day, but now she is sick." In this manner she chatted on.

"That is very good of your mamma," replied the chaplain, deeply impressed with this sketch of the mother's care for her child's soul in the midst of such a wandering life. "I hope you also will be very pious."

"Are you good?" said the child to the astonished Curt.

"That is for your sermon, Curt," said the priest kindly; "but come, my boy, your mother will be waiting for you."

"No, no; stay a little while longer!" cried Nora, as she held Curt fast by the hand. "Let your brother go." She looked at him imploringly, which was not disagreeable to the boy; who looked on her as a new and wonderful plaything.

"What a queer little thing you are!" he said; "but there is mamma," he added, rising as his mother came out of a room on the corridor.

"What are you all doing?" said the lady, as she advanced to the group.

The chaplain was about to give an explanation, when another door was opened by a wild, strange-looking woman. She approached the countess, who drew back as if from a maniac.

"Oh, help, help!" cried the woman in broken speech and wringing her hands. "Missus die! Missus die! and no one there to help her."

"What is she saying?" asked the countess; but Nora threw herself in the old woman's arms crying, "This is my Annie. Annie, what is the matter?"

"Oh, Miss Nora, mamma is sick and massa away!"

"Mamma is sick," repeated the child, as she burst into tears. "Oh, mamma, mamma!"

"There seems help needed, your reverence," said the countess. "Will you try to find out from the woman who the lady's husband is, and where he is staying, that I may know what to do?" and without any more hesitation she went to the sick-room, led by the cries of the child.

Helena was still lying on the couch, but her head had fallen back; her lovely features seemed convulsed, and a stream of blood flowing from her lips showed but too plainly what had occurred. Across the mother lay the little girl, calling her loving names, which, alas! fell unheeded on unconscious ears. Curt, who had followed, was trying to console the child. The countess, quickly taking in the situation, whispered to her son, "Try to get the child away that she may not agitate

the mother, and then call a physician." She then approached the sick woman, placed her head gently in a better position, bathed her temples, and moistened her lips.

"Mother," whispered the invalid, as she opened her eyes wide ; but they wore a questioning expression as they fell on the unknown face.

"Be perfectly quiet," said the countess gently ; "I am a friend whom an accident brought into your sick-room. Allow me to care for you until your husband comes. I have already sent for him."

A look of gratitude rewarded her, and then the weary eyes again closed. Helena breathed with difficulty, and a hollow rattle was heard in the throat. The countess looked attentively at her ; she saw the dark shadows creep around the eyes and the drawn look settle on the mouth ; she also noticed a prayer-book lying near the travelling clock, and in the folds of the bed-clothes a rosary, which seemed to have fallen from the sick woman's hand. Low and distinctly the countess said, "Is there any one you would like to see before your husband comes?"

Again the eyes opened languidly and slowly, the lips moved rapidly, but no sound could be heard ; the hand made a sign on the forehead and breast, which the countess understood, and by way of answer she made the sign of the cross, saying, "My private chaplain is here ; do you wish that he should go for the priest of the parish?"

Helena clasped her hands and stammered, "Oh, quick, quick ! I have much to say."

The chaplain came into the room. He was very young. Shortly after his ordination he had become tutor in the household of the countess, and this was the first time that he had been called on to perform the duties of his sacred office at the sick-bed. Helena gave him a penetrating look, and seeing the purity of youth and the holiness of his calling in his face, felt that she could trust him with her last request to her husband.

Through a remarkable dispensation of Providence the chatter of a child had enabled him to understand a state of things which would otherwise have required a long explanation to make intelligible. His advice was in accordance with her wishes, and afforded her the peace and rest to which she had long been a stranger, as she confided to him her desires with regard to her child.

Her peace with God was soon made. A simple, child-like spirit, which had remained uncorrupted by the world, had long prepared her for this hour. Had she had a presentiment of the nearness of the end, or had the agitation of the morning hastened it?

At this moment her husband, who but just heard of the state of his wife, entered, and his grief was uncontrollable. Helena's pale face flushed a little, a loving glance brightened her eyes, but the peace so lately gained was disturbed. It is hard to die when loving arms are holding us tightly and earthly happiness asserts its sway. In the depth of his agony Alfred was entirely unconscious of strangers. Helena knew that she had not long to remain, and asked for her child. Alfred seemed not to hear, but the countess, herself a mother,

understood, and motioned Curt, who brought in the frightened little one, still clinging to him. He placed her on the couch close to her mother.

Was it a wild feeling of jealousy at seeing a stranger bring her babe, or was it in order to attract Alfred's attention to the child which made Helena push the boy away with nervous haste and place her husband's hand on Nora? There was something in the action which wounded the boy's sensibility, and he stepped back flushed to the forehead. With the quickness of vision, often peculiar to the dying, Helena noticed all this, and stretching out her hand to the boy, she beckoned him to come nearer and nearer, until he stood close beside her. His was a beautiful face, and from his large brown eyes tears rolled down for the sorrows of these strangers. Helena looked earnestly at him, then raising her feeble hand and placing it on his head, as if with a blessing, her lips moved and seemed to form the words *thank you*, but a violent fit of coughing interrupted her, and the towel which they held to her lips was dyed with a scarlet stream. At length the doctor came and applied himself to do all in his power, although his practised eye saw how vain science now was. He recommended them to take the child away; the kind chaplain took the husband under his care, but the countess remained constant in her task of loving charity, and through the long night the still young life struggled with the destroyer, until the morning dawned on the departing spirit.

Around Helena's couch knelt this strangely collected

party, representing such different phases of society. The priest, who had given the departed the last consolations of religion, and who was now caring so lovingly for the bereaved husband ; the boy, holding the orphan, who had cried herself to sleep in his arms ; the countess, supporting with sisterly solicitude the head of the stranger, the wife of the circus director, whose position she felt inclined to question only a few hours ago.

A week had elapsed since the death ; for three days had Helena's body rested in the earth. The grief of the husband had become more subdued, and every-day life was again asserting its rights. It is a mercy that stern reality forces itself upon us unbidden and takes us out of our sorrows.

In every great grief, as in every great event, there exists a certain levelling power which quietly sets aside the social laws. The countess, in her own practical, helpful way, had taken this family, so strangely and intimately brought to her notice, under her immediate protection, and she kept little Nora close beside her, in order that the child might feel her loss as little as possible. At length, however, it became imperative that things should resume their natural course. Karsten wished to leave a spot where he had known so much sorrow. He came for his little girl and to take leave of the countess. For the first time that distinguished lady found herself called upon to face the difference that exists between the various stations in life, and it was a strange experience for her to meet as an equal the man who moved in a sphere unknown to her. She

belonged to that aristocratic circle which seeks or sympathizes only with its equals, and yet we have seen that she did not shrink from intercourse when duty to her neighbor required it. Hers was a nature that knows neither weakness nor enthusiasm, but is governed by an unyielding sense of duty, a character capable of gaining great spiritual merit, but not calculated to win much love.

The teachings of Christian charity made her stand by the strangers in affliction and leave no duty neglected ; but that motive gone, she wished they would never cross her path again. Too thoroughly well bred to allow this feeling to be offensively apparent, she limited all further intercourse with them to the absolutely unavoidable.

Alfred Karsten had at one time been too nearly allied to this rank in life, and even yet harbored too much secret sympathy with it, not to fully understand the state of affairs, and not thoroughly to realize his own position, which, however, he well knew how to respect. The countess could not fail to be impressed by his quiet dignity and perfectly cultured manners, while the natural beauty of his features was enhanced by the earnest expression of his grief.

“ And your child, will she accompany you ? ” asked the countess, after Karsten had expressed his gratitude in the warmest manner and spoken of his departure.

A sad expression crossed his face, and brushing his hand over his brow, as if to recover his composure, he said in a trembling voice, “ No ; one stroke robs me of everything. Your chaplain has communicated to

me my wife's last wishes with regard to our daughter. They shall be sacred to me. I already knew her opinion on the subject. She may have been right in saying that my way of living is not a desirable path in which to bring up a girl, and I shall faithfully comply with her request. The priest has kindly given me some addresses, and my first care will be to place Nora in a convent school."

"In a convent school!" said the countess, with astonishment.

"You see an incongruity in this, madam," he replied in bitter tones. "I myself would have selected a different system of education for my daughter, but her mother's wish shall be my law. She was brought up in a convent, and always retained a great love for it. May our daughter be as good and sweet as her mother," he added, while a dark cloud again crossed his brow.

"You are making a great sacrifice," said the countess, "but you will have the comfort of knowing that you place your daughter in the very best of hands."

He bowed and pursued the subject no further. The chaplain entered just at that moment, and presented letters to Karsten and directions with regard to the matter in question. Both men clasped hands cordially, for these days of sorrow had brought them very near.

"Nora, our time is flying," said Karsten to the little girl, who, standing in the window, did not seem to pay any attention; she was looking at Curt, who had just said, "Take this little book in remembrance of to-day."

"Write your name in it," she pleaded.

The boy drew out a pencil in order to humor her.

"Oh, you are writing more," she said, looking over his shoulder.

He put his hand on her mouth and said quickly, "Hush, hush ! Read this, but not aloud."

" 'When friends part they say, *Until we meet again.*' Oh, how pretty !"

"But you must not let any one see it," he urged, unwilling, boy-like, that any one should discover how much he felt. "Now, what are you going to give me at parting ?" he asked, as he lifted her lightly from the window-seat.

She thought a minute, and then holding one of her curls, said to him naïvely, "Will you take this ? That was what mamma gave papa as a remembrance."

The boy smiled and blushed. Although but thirteen, the association of idea seemed to strike him. She noticed his hesitation, and quickly detaching the pearl and diamond heart from her neck, said, "No, take this."

"Your lovely heart which you received from the Emperor of Russia ! Oh, no ; you must not do that," said he, declining it.

"But I can do it, and will do it, and you must take it. I do not love any one in the world as well as you except papa," and she threw her little arms around him.

"You will not be a circus-rider, will you ?" he whispered, as he hung the ornament on his watch-chain.

"Nora," again called her father ; "come, my child, we must say good-by."

Nora held the boy's hand fast as she came forward and looked at the countess, whose portly figure and cold features did not excite her sympathy much, and into whose hand she silently put hers.

"Have you nothing to say?" inquired her father.

"*Au revoir !*" she said, as if the words were the echo of something in her heart.

The countess seemed strangely disturbed. Had the child pronounced what *she* least desired? But after a moment she took the little one on her lap and said, "Well, let it be *au revoir*. I hope I shall then find you well and happy."

"And you also," answered the child, as she freed herself from the lady's embrace and, bursting into tears, ran to Curt. Karsten wished to say good-by to Curt, but his voice entirely deserted him. Probably the mute, manly shake of the hand which he gave made a deeper impression on the boy than words could have done. One more silent leave-taking with the chaplain, and father and daughter were gone.

"What a peculiar man! What strange circumstances!" said the countess to the priest after a pause. "What queer fate has placed him in such a position? His whole appearance shows him to be above his calling, and yet he seems to be perfectly happy in it. Where does he think of placing his child?"

The priest named one of the principal educational institutions in Belgium.

"Good heavens! your reverence, what induced you to give him the address of that place, where only the

daughters of our first families are educated? It will be most mortifying to the poor child."

"Karsten was most particular on the point. He wished only the best and most desirable for his daughter. He must be rich."

"That is of no consequence," replied the countess impatiently. "What can be expected from such a low life? The convent school is not for those who have wandered all over creation. Intuition and the tastes bred by early training will bring her back to the habits of childhood. A thousand times better that she had never left the path she had entered."

"The mother's principal care was for the soul of her child, and on this account she dreaded the influences that surround a circus-rider. She hoped that a good education and piety would prove a shield in later years to her daughter, and, therefore, wished her to be instructed in all that could prove conducive to this end."

"Illusions, illusions, my friend. They are only preparing unhappiness for her. She will find no place where she can take root."

"We must trust something to God's providence," said the priest quietly. "*God's flowers bloom in any soil*;" and the mother's pious care could find no other way by which to assure her child's safety."

These words sank deep into the heart of Curt, who continued standing, sadly mourning for his little play-fellow, and on whom the hard words of his mother fell heavily, though he could not tell himself why. Since the evening when he held the child in his arms and re-

ceived the dying mother's blessing, Nora's lot seemed to interest him, and he felt that in some way he would be responsible for it. He was old enough to realize the dangers of her position, and he grieved when he thought on the possibilities of her future. He wished to save and shelter her, and all kinds of plans ran through his brain. He thought of asking his mother to adopt her and bring her up with her own children, but he was afraid to mention the idea, for he knew that she would laugh at it. "*God's flowers bloom in any soil*" was his consolation, for to him Nora was like a tender flower.

CHAPTER III.

TEN years had passed. In the court of one of the numerous schools in Brussels a number of half-grown girls were gathered round an old well. It was a custom in the school for the pupils during the mid-day recreation to draw water, and it was always a great source of frolic and a chance for practical jokes.

It would seem as if the babbling waters must have some mysterious charm to unloose woman's tongue, for from time immemorial wells have been favorite places of rendezvous for gossip. Around the convent fountain there was now a whispering and a buzzing that would have done credit to the Tower of Babel.

"See here, see here," cried a loud voice; "see what I can do!" and the speaker, with a dexterous hand, seized a bucket full of water, and lightly swinging it to her head walked away.

"Rebecca at the well! Rebecca at the well!" was heard on all sides. "Nora, you look like a picture cut out of the Bible."

The comparison was not bad. The tall, slight figure, clad in a simple dress, the white handkerchief folded like a turban under the pitcher, the somewhat sharp, but marked features, the black tresses hanging on either side of the graceful neck—all made a picture which might well remind one of the chosen of the patriarch,

as the young girl stepped lightly up the steps of the well. "Not a drop has fallen ; who can do that ?" Of course the attempt was made by many, and more than one dripping head tried to escape the notice of the Sister in charge, who had just stepped in another direction. Her absence seemed to encourage some of the boldest to repeat the trial and to plan some mischievous tricks.

"Lily !" cried they to a younger girl who was seen to approach, and whose timid step bespoke her a new arrival ; "Lily, to-day the water is to be carried on the head. You must try to do it."

"I cannot, I cannot," protested the child, but they formed a circle around her and raised the vessel to her head without more ado. A movement made it fall to the ground, and the crying, drenched little one stood motionless in the midst of the wild, laughing group.

"A sailor baptism ! Let us have a sailor baptism !" screamed one saucy girl. The proposition found universal favor, and among fresh shouts of joy a second shower covered the newly initiated ; the next minute, however, she who had inaugurated the play strode forth and, standing before Lily, cried, "Shame on you all, you big girls, to frighten the child ! Another drop, and I'll teach you to be sorry for it."

"Oh, Nora always wants things her way !" shouted one defiantly. "But do not mind her. Forward, march ! Lily is wet now, and she must be further baptized."

Nora, who was quicker than the attacking party, threw a well-aimed stream of water at them, so that,

screaming and laughing, they had to withdraw, but only to gather their forces, and for some minutes, if not a bloody at least a watery fight was waged.

“Is this becoming conduct for young ladies?” was suddenly heard from the Sister in charge, whose return in the heat of the battle had not been noticed. “Who began this rude sport?” she continued. “Lily, you look terribly. I shall report the entire affair to Mother Superior.”

With these words she looked inquiringly into the circle, where silence now reigned. The majority sought, with guilty countenances, to get into the background. Nora alone stood unmoved in her place with the pitcher in her hand.

“Ah, so it is you, Miss Nora!” said the Sister sharply. “I should have hoped that your long residence in this institution would have taught you better than to be guilty of such rudeness; but you seem to be incorrigible. I saw that you lifted the pitcher and were the promoter of all this trouble. I shall not fail to report it to Mother Superior, whose indulgence seems to make you all the more haughty. You will remain in your room during the remainder of the recreation, in order that you may have time to reflect. You, Lily, go take off your wet clothes. The young ladies will, it is hoped, remember that such an affair must not happen again.”

It is a peculiarity of small minds to throw the responsibility of guilt on one person. Nora's rather independent spirit and the too apparent favor of the Mother Superior for her had long been a thorn in the flesh of

this Sister, who now directed her sharp, bitter words to her alone. The evil of party spirit is to be found more or less in every state.

Nora received the order with perfect equanimity. Not a word of explanation passed her lips. She merely cast a look of contempt over the dumb group, not one of whom came to her defence, tossed her haughty head in the air, refilled her pitcher, and walked into the house.

The others followed her, some of the more honest whispering, "We should not have allowed the whole blame to fall on Nora. She was the least guilty, and she is always so good to everybody. Why didn't Lily speak?"

"*She* speak!" continued another contemptuously.

"Oh, bah! What does it matter?" said the one who had been the leader of the assault. "Madame will not punish her; she always protects her on account of the secrecy of her descent. None of us know whence she came, and her remarkable talent for acting creates suspicion."

"It is very strange that we are obliged to associate with girls of whose parents nothing is known," said a tall, haggard, vinegar-visaged girl.

"It is worse when they are known," replied another, who by her quick repartee carried a sting, for it was no secret that the one who was so tenacious of descent did not bear one of the most distinguished names.

"For my part," said the last speaker, "I do not care whether we know anything of Nora's family or not. We do know that she is the best and cleverest of us all,

and her silence under unjust punishment proves it. To me she is the best and truest friend, be her descent higher or lower than mine."

The speaker was the daughter of a German prince, and her conduct was another proof that those who are sure of their position are often the most liberal.

All the rest of the day Nora had ample time for reflection. While her companions enjoyed recreation, she sat alone in her room and gazed at the mountains, whose tops appeared on the horizon.

The face which had been so gleesome in the morning was now deeply earnest, and the mouth quivered like that of a sobbing child. The solitude to which she was condemned did not distress her. She loved it, as do all earnest natures who commune with self. Perhaps the shadows of the distant mountains had an influence upon her, perhaps the blood which mounted to cheek and forehead was too feverish for the confinement of walls and longed to fly far beyond their limits.

A trembling hand touched her shoulder, a blonde head caressed her, and a timid voice said, "Are you lonely, Nora? It was mean of me to allow you to be punished for protecting me."

"Oh, is that you, Lily? Do not trouble yourself. The punishment is nothing; but why were you so silent, little chicken-heart?"

"I never can speak; I am always so afraid; but I am so sorry on your account. You have always been so good and kind to me," said the little girl, as she threw her arms around Nora's neck.

The latter kissed her, saying, "Another time you will know how to speak." Then looking at Lily sharply, she added, "But you have been crying again. Shame! Who else could be so woeful for three months?"

"I cannot help it. I am here against my will, and I am homesick. You look sad also, Nora. You are homesick, too, but you are too proud to acknowledge it."

"Homesick!" said Nora. "No, on the contrary, I believe I am *far-away-sick*. I have been here ten years, and it has become a home to me, and yet I want to go away. The ground burns beneath my feet. Oh, that I could once again see other people, other places; once more see a horse, and jump in the air!" She stretched out her arms longingly.

"Well, why don't you go home? You are quite grown up," said Lily, with all the respect which fifteen feels for seventeen.

Nora blushed as she answered hesitatingly, "I have no home. My mother died when I was young, and my father is travelling."

"Where is your father?" inquired Lily inquisitively.

Nora blushed still more deeply, and did not answer. Ever since those days long ago in Switzerland she had a peculiar feeling with regard to her father's position, which the reserve of the nuns had strengthened. She now turned a deaf ear to the question, and the entrance of one of the other pupils gave her an excuse for changing the subject.

"Come in, Elizabeth ; come in," she said. "We both are rather blue here ; Lily is homesick."

"And Nora is *far-away-sick*," added the latter.

"*Far-away-sick!*" repeated the newcomer, who was no other than Nora's champion of a few minutes before. "*Far-away-sick!* I don't know what that means. I so love the quiet within these walls, where one has but one object in view, that I dread to leave them."

"I understand your meaning," said Nora, turning to the last speaker, "but I am not like you. My thoughts wander over the whole earth, while yours only tend upward."

"Happily said, as usual, Nora," replied Elizabeth smilingly ; "but who knows what the future may bring forth, let our wishes be what they may."

"The future !" gasped Nora. "Oh, how I should like to know what it has in store ! It is such an enigma to me, that I can form no idea how my life may be passed."

"I know my future perfectly," said Lily contentedly.

"You, little one !" exclaimed both the elder girls together.

"Yes ; why not ? My aunt settled it all. I am to remain one year here ; then I shall return home and marry my cousin."

The two girls laughed aloud and said, "You marry your cousin ! Are you quite sure ? Do you know him ?"

"There is nothing to laugh at," continued the child, pouting. "It was papa's dying wish, and my aunt and every one approves of it."

"Who is the happy cousin?" persisted the teasing Nora just as the bell was heard.

"That is your call to the Superior," said Elizabeth. "Sister Barbara seemed inexorable when we made excuses for you."

Lily stole up to Nora and said, "Shall I accompany you and tell how it happened?"

"No, sweetheart; I shall not trouble you. I fight my own battles." A look of fearless energy shone in her eyes as she added gayly, "I long to struggle with life and conquer. Better a whirlwind than everlasting quiet; and now for the little storm which Sister has raised."

"Be careful; it may be worse than you think," warned Elizabeth, with all the importance which school-life attaches to such things, where the blue ribbon of good conduct is as much coveted as the honors in the gift of a prince.

Nora went forward laughingly and sprang upstairs two steps at a time, but at the Superior's door she hesitated like a raw recruit who dreads to aggravate the danger by boldness. She had not, however, to encounter the eye of the Superior ready to pronounce judgment, for the latter was lost in thought, sitting at her table with an open letter before her, from which she looked to the young girl with a troubled expression.

Madame Sybille was a small, delicate woman, but her eyes shone with the energy which is so necessary in the directress of a large institution, such as that of which we write. As Nora approached her she arose,

and with both hands drew the girl gently toward her, saying, "My child, there is always a turning-point in life, on which our future greatly depends."

Nora had expected to be addressed so differently, that those earnest words impressed her so deeply, she could only say, in the most anxious accent, "Oh, father! Oh, father!"

"Compose yourself," said the nun hastily. "He is well and very happy, dear, as he writes in this letter, in which he charges me to prepare you for an event which is shortly to take place."

Nora looked bewildered, then a gleam of hope overspread her countenance as she asked, "Is he going to abandon the business?"

The nun shook her head, and it seemed hard for her to speak. "My child," she continued at length, "it is a long time since God took his wife, your mother, to Himself. Providence gave you a home with us. Would to God that it were in our power to give you all a mother's love!"

Nora pressed her lips to the hand of Madame Sybille, who had been the first to console her orphan sorrow, and on whose breast she had cried bitter tears on being separated from her father. A tender tie bound her to the woman who had filled the place of her dead mother as fully as the rules of the cloister would allow.

"Your father has been very lonesome, doubly lonesome on account of the sacrifice which he made for your education. He is now anxious to create a new

domestic circle and to give you a home. He is going to be married, my child."

Nora's eyes opened wider and wider ; she seemed unable to comprehend the words, and she merely stared vacantly.

"He is going to be married," repeated the nun, as she resumed her seat. "He sends the announcement of his betrothal to a Miss Emily Lauer."

It was scarcely possible to judge whether Nora had understood the simple words or not, her eyes looked so vacant, but she threw her hands over her head and uttered a piercing cry of sorrow.

"Sit down, darling," said the nun, handing her a chair and embracing her fondly. Nora's head fell heavily on her shoulder ; her forebodings seemed about to be realized. She and her father were most tenderly united, although they had seen so little of each other. Several times in the year he visited her, and the whole school was generally thrown into a state of excitement over the splendid-looking man who showered gifts on his daughter which made her very proud of him. He also wrote, and in his correspondence with her, as had formerly been the case with her mother, his finest feelings found expression. His early training, too, was so perceptible throughout his writing, that Nora, as she grew older, was not slow to recognize that it was only misfortune which caused him to adopt his profession, and to conclude that it must be a source of unhappiness to him.

To be a comfort to him, to replace by her love all that

she suspected he had lost, and to do all in her power to reconcile him to his lot, had long been her childhood's dream. She had determined to be all to him, to be the nearest and dearest, and now she had calmly to see that coveted place filled and her mother's memory, perhaps, effaced.

To youth the inconstancy of love seems an unnatural thing, from which it shrinks. Nora's father, from being her idol, sank deeply in her estimation, for the young always rush into extremes when their feelings are wounded. Alas ! later years teach them how much those feelings can bear.

Madame Sybille saw the bitter expression on Nora's mouth and the violence with which she pushed away her father's letter, and said to her, as she stroked her dark hair, " My child, do not condemn that which you cannot understand. You little know the loneliness of advancing years."

" But he had me !" cried the girl violently. " I would so willingly have hastened to him. Oh, it is unpardonable in him !"

" And would you have always remained with him ? Children often go away."

A deep blush rose to Nora's forehead, and that indescribable something which such a question awakes in every girl went through her heart. She remembered how lately she had tried to penetrate the future, and her eyes sank in confusion.

" No one has the right to measure the happiness of others by his own standard ; that is mere egotism.

Look on this matter as the decree of Providence. Your father wishes to provide a home for you, to which he can bring you soon after his marriage. You will then leave us, dear child, which I, for one, shall regret very much."

But Nora paid no attention to the kind words ; her thoughts were too much preoccupied.

"Is the lady—the lady," she hesitated, and in a trembling voice continued—"one of the company?"

"It is not probable," said Madame Sybille in a conciliatory voice, "that he would seek a companion in any other sphere. He has not said so directly, but his silence leaves this to be inferred. He says that her goodness and amiability will be sure to make you happy."

"Oh!" cried Nora in despair, and throwing herself into the Superior's arms. "Worse and worse! Do not let me go to her! Keep me here! keep me here!" and she burst into a torrent of tears.

The nun embraced the weeping, trembling child as if she longed to keep her safe. Had the words been spoken from her soul? Were they the echoes of her heart's desire? Madame was a true religious, long-serving in her vocation. Hundreds of children had she welcomed, and as many had she seen bid her a tearful farewell. What deep, conscientious interest she had taken in their welfare, forgetful of self! But there are natures which possess a magic influence, as there are lands which seem a paradise. With rare intelligence this good nun had always tried to smooth away prej-

udices born of difference of position in life, and in this case Nora's heartfelt love rewarded her. She had formed a deep friendship for the child whose future had occupied so much of her thought. Nora was not one to pass through life unnoticed, and to take a humble place. What a life, what an influence awaited her ! She would be thrown into the most trying position without protection, without guardianship. Was it, then, to be wondered at that Madame Sybille wished her favorite in God's house ? to plant this tender flower in the shade of these walls, where she could be protected from every storm ?

Never, save in prayer, had a word of all this passed her lips ; but now the appeal of the child encouraged her to say, " Stay, my dear child. Can you decide to remain with us, and to walk in the quiet path for God and in God ? He gives the fullest peace, and is the safest haven in the tempest. I would hail the hour of your entrance."

She spoke affectionately and impressively. Nora's head lay against her shoulder, so that her countenance was not visible, but raising up her face the girl said softly and decidedly, " No, no, I cannot. It was only pride that inspired the thought. Peace and quiet I do not choose ; in the haven I cannot remain. Rather would I face the storm and conquer the danger. I have been happy here, but do not ask me to stay. Let me away, away ! I cannot be Mary at the Lord's feet."

A look of disappointment passed over the face of the nun, and then she smiled at the wild language of the

girl and said, "Then go, my child, go. Every one must choose his own path. May the battle not be too fierce for you. Struggles and dangers are not always bad for us. I shall miss you—your old friend will miss you. It is only one more sacrifice which the Master asks ; we shall be united in spirit."

"Oh, how will it all end ? It is so dreadful !" said Nora, shuddering.

" ' Seek not to know the future,' writes Thomas à Kempis ; accommodate yourself to it. Remember one thing, wherever your life may be cast, the child is not above the father ; this is the law of both God and man. Accept it with humility from the beginning. Our parting is not far distant. In three months your father will come for you. Now go, the Angelus is ringing. In prayer you can best recollect yourself. I give you permission to have your supper brought to your room ; one is best alone when meeting trials. Go now, dearest, answer your father's letter affectionately, for he has always been a loving father to you."

Nora left the room. She read her father's letter, and dwelt on the love which, as usual, it expressed for her. She tried to think unselfishly on her fate, and to picture the impending change in the most glowing colors. After going to bed she lay awake a long time, and as her eye rested on each familiar object, which years of association had endeared to her, she felt as if about to lose everything. From the black cross on the wall to the white curtains around her bed, all was simple, pure and tasteful, as is fitting to a young girl before she

enters on the glare and restlessness of the world. Quiet and simplicity pervaded everything, like the fresh perfume of the wild flower, and stood out in startling contrast to the uncertainty and publicity which awaited her. Once more the haven she had sighed to leave seemed to invite her, and the pang of separation so tightened around her heart that she sobbed aloud.

A light step approached and an arm was thrown around her neck. It was Lily, who shared her room, and who now asked simply, "Was it so very bad?"

"What?" said Nora, who had quite forgotten the occurrences of the day. "Oh, no," she quickly added, recollecting herself; "it was nothing. I am going away, Lily; going away from here to father."

"Then your *far-away-sickness* is cured?" replied her little friend. "But why do you cry?"

"Oh, Lily, pray that it may not turn out *homesickness*; perhaps I was impatient."

"How can it be homesickness in the midst of home?" persisted her questioner.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was April. Gray clouds chased one another in the sky ; miniature snowflakes flew in the wind, but where the clouds separated the blue heaven smiled out, and the sun shot down bright rays which thawed the snowflakes and hung them like glistening jewels on the tender brown and green buds. The earth seemed warm with spring's sweet breath. Oh, the joyous, laughing month of April ! It beguiles man from the cold winter and the plants and flowers from their protecting clay, only to mock them with a whistling wind and shower. Yet who can resist the tricky sprite, notwithstanding all her fickleness ?

On that April day a looker-on in the great Rhenish university town might have seen a great crowd, which walked up and down beneath the leafless trees as though it thirsted to drink in the first spring air and bask in the rays of King Sol, who seemed to have reasserted his sway ; and yet small pools of water in the streets stood tell-tale witnesses of the storm only just past, and certain dark streaks in the sky gave unmistakable warning of what might be expected.

Among the promenaders the bright-colored, saucy cap of the student was prominent, the independent step of its wearer telling that it felt at home here. There must be some strange affinity between the Ger-

man April and German student life. As April is the stepping-stone from the storms and fury of March to the warmth and promise of May, so the student period is the unfolding of the character, the gradual approach from boyhood's wild dreams to man's thoughtful earnestness. A secret, indescribable change is going on in these middle periods of nature and of man.

April showers cover the earth with golden vines, juicy fruits, and shady trees ; student life fills the world with earnest workers and good men.

The young people on the promenade showed the well-known brotherhood which exists between collegians, gathering in groups and seemingly absorbed in matters of self-importance ; matters of trifling interest to the uninitiated, but of grave import to those within the mystic circle.

One of these groups was separating with bows and hand-shakings, and the words " Hotel X., four o'clock ; Bolé " betrayed their plans for the close of the day. Two members of this party, who in figure and personal appearance presented a marked difference, turned into an adjacent street. The extreme corpulence, the youthful, round face, blonde locks, and florid complexion of the one would have given merely the impression of German ease and comfort, did not a closer view of the clear gray eye and the compressed mouth tell of a judgment rarely mistaken and a purpose rarely foiled.

His companion seemed thin by comparison, but he was sufficiently developed for the ensuring of strength and endurance. His expression was as changing as his

friend's was steadfast, and although his eyes were retreating, they were his best feature. They had the depth and brilliancy usually accompanying brown eyes, and while perhaps lacking determination, were full of sentiment and thought. The broad forehead was indicative of fair talent, and its white, smooth surface seemed the home of honesty and purity. The lower part of the face was the weak point, the thin mustache shading a mouth which indicated amiability more than strength. His words, too, carried this idea as he said, twirling his cane in the air, "I believe that this is the only spot where one really lives. Here one goes and comes and enjoys himself better than anywhere else. Nature allures, men allure, life allures, so that one feels with each breath the glorious joy of freedom."

"You Southerners are always boys in your universities," said his companion, with that quiet contempt which the practical North German loves to show for those who do not agree with him. "Everything here is secondary to the golden freedom—*vulgo*, beer or golden vine juice. You must be prepared for to-night. At the last bout a certain fox got caught early in the evening."

"The beginning is always hard, but perseverance conquers," replied the other, laughing. "But, frankly, those bouts are little to my taste; one can hardly be temperate."

"Better to go, however, than never to have been fuddled in this vale of tears. The head to which wine has

never mounted has nothing in it. Where do you propose to rest from over-study this Easter vacation?"

"I have not yet decided. Come, listen, Dahnow; accompany me home, and see the spot where your parents so often were and where our fathers became friends."

"Thank you heartily for the invitation, but I would prefer going in autumn, during the hunting season. Will your mother welcome you home then again?" asked Dahnow slyly.

"She has always a welcome for me whenever I come."

"Well, proposition for proposition, Degenthal. Let us make a tour through the valley of the Neckar. I have been discussing it with some friends."

"That would not be so bad; I shall write home on the subject."

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Dahnow impatiently. "Decide for yourself; you are not tied to your mother's apron-strings."

A look of vexation passed over the countenance of Degenthal, and he drew himself up as he said, "You may have your own opinions on these subjects, but I cannot endure the coarse carelessness with which it is the fashion here to refer to home; there is something boorish in it which grates on me."

"It is equally disagreeable to me, although I am not so happy as to have a home," replied the stout companion. "Nevertheless, a man is a man, and a child is a child. Exaggeration oversteps itself in the long run,

and if you stop now to ask about trifles, after awhile you will not follow advice in important matters, for no one is always submissive."

There was a certain force in this argument which the other was unable to refute. Submission to the will of another had become half habit and half duty with him. After a few minutes he added in an apologetic tone, "My mother has almost exclusively guided my education, and I do not wish to oppose her."

"Now, now, do not misunderstand me. No one must make assertions which he is not ready to substantiate. Your mother is too intelligent not to consider your will while she expects her own judgment to be respected. Show a certain independence; that will strengthen you and not offend her."

Degenthal remained silent, while with his stick he knocked the heads off the flowers by the roadside. It was a new experience to hear that which he had always considered a virtue criticised.

Like many women to whom fate has given the exclusive guidance of their sons, the countess had influenced Curt through his filial sentiments. Now he began to understand why his tutor had so often tried to change the existing circumstances, but the uncomfortable feeling which so often accompanies a sense of being in the wrong took possession of him, and they let the subject drop. They walked on in silence until they were obliged to draw aside in order to let pass two riders, whose horses' hoofs made but little noise, owing to the soft, sandy soil.

"Thunder ! What horses ! I have never seen finer !" cried Dahnow.

"But what a rider ! She was beautiful. Who can she be ?" added the other with enthusiasm.

"Well, if she wants to be looked at she must not mount such a gray. It is the finest animal my eyes ever gazed upon."

"What taste ! The lady blinded me to the brute. Dahnow, you know every one in these parts ; who can they be ? The gentleman's face seems familiar to me ; the lady had dark hair."

"God bless us, boy, you are observant. They are not natives ; such horses are not to be found about here ; they must be strangers. Tourists swarm at this season. But, friend, if you can bring back your gaze from following the beauty, please look at the clouds."

"It has become cool and looks threatening ; we must hasten our steps if we mean to get under shelter in time."

"Run, then," replied the stout one. "Running is no joke to me ; one gets out of breath and wet into the bargain. Now, one evil is enough for me."

"Then I leave you to your fate ; my breath can run a race with the storm. At four we meet, provided you are not washed away in the mean time ; there is no danger of your being blown away."

Dahnow phlegmatically buttoned his coat around him, and plodded resolutely through the snow and hail, which began to fall heavily. As he approached the town he met the equestrians returning. As they were passing him the lady's hat flew off, and was carried by

the wind along the muddy road. The accident caused her to rein up her galloping horse, and she did it with a skill that was not lost on his appreciative eye.

With an agility scarcely to be credited in one of his build, he sprang forward and saved the hat just as it was on the point of falling into a deep dyke, and carried it back to its owner. A small gloved hand was stretched to receive it, a glowing countenance looked out from a wealth of wet hair, and a pair of deep blue eyes shone with such a sweet expression of gratitude, that even the tightly-buttoned overcoat did not keep its owner proof against a certain delight which shot to the heart of our fat student. The high wind wafted away her spoken thanks, and the truant hat once safely secured, the fair rider followed her companion on a full gallop and was soon lost to sight.

"By George!" muttered Dahnow to himself. "The rascal was right; she is a beauty! If it were not for the miserable plight in which the storm has left me I would hunt through the hotels until I found her name; but as it is I would cut a pretty figure," he added, as he looked down sadly on his wet and muddy clothes.

A couple of hours later the joyous voice of Degenthal greeted him with the words, "Hello! You are not drowned."

"No, as you may perceive; and, furthermore, I have had a lucky adventure."

"Fat people are always lucky."

"Your grayhound put you on a wrong scent. Guess

whom I have seen. Such a providential opening to an introduction ! A truly knightly service."

"What ! To the pretty equestrienne ? She fell from her horse, and you saved her ?"

"Unfortunately only her hat."

"*Unfortunately*, wretch ! Who is she ?"

"It was not written on the hat."

"Pshaw ! Your acquaintance did not go far. Come, let us go in ; the others are waiting for us."

The young men had made an appointment to meet that evening to give a dinner in honor of a former companion, who had returned to enjoy a few days of student life. They were gathered round a table somewhat apart, and soon the sound of merry repartee, laughing, and the popping of champagne sent repeated echoes from their corner of the dining-room. Dahnow, who possessed that rare talent which a witty Frenchman described as the power of looking serious while making others laugh, gave an amusing account of his morning adventure. His story provoked many light questions and witty answers.

Suddenly Degenthal stood up close to his friend and, pointing to a stranger, who had just entered and taken a seat, whispered, "Look, there he is !" Returning to his seat, he communed with himself, "I am sure I know him ; I have seen those features before."

Dahnow turned to the rest of the company and said, "There sits our hero, but without the heroine. He is probably a tyrannical father or a jealous husband, who shuts his beauty up from the vulgar gaze."

The eyes of the young men turned toward the new arrival, when the guest of the evening broke out, "Indeed, you are right ; he is very particular not to show his womenfolk. That is Karsten, the great circus director. I saw him a few weeks ago at W——, where he was going to exhibit. He has a young wife, who is pretty. It must have been her whom you young gentlemen saw," continued the speaker.

"No, no ; it must have been Nora—little Nora ! How is it possible that I did not know her ? I must see her !" cried Degenthal excitedly.

"Nora—little Nora ! It seems that you are rather familiar," said Dahnow with astonishment.

"Nora Karsten," reiterated Degenthal, not noticing his friend's commentary. "No wonder the features seemed familiar. How beautiful she has grown !"

"Our fox seems bewitched," chimed the whole company. "Here, fox, is to your equestrian princess. She will not be so coy, surely, as to refuse her acquaintance to the rest of us."

The light tone of the young men wounded Degenthal, and he turned to them with an earnest, sad expression, saying, "Gentlemen, a strange accident brought my mother and the family of Herr Karsten together. Miss Nora was then but a child, and being under my mother's protection, we became fast friends. That is all there is to it."

The students exchanged looks of incredulity, and one of them, to whose head the wine had mounted, lifted his glass with the toast, "To our fox's youthful friendship."

Degenthal's eyes flashed, and he was about to return an angry reply, when Dahnow arrested him by drawing his attention to the fact that Karsten was about to leave the room.

Degenthal hastened toward the director, and in a voice trembling with emotion said, "Herr Karsten, allow me to renew our acquaintance, formed in Geneva—Count Degenthal," he added, as the other evidently did not recognize him.

"Count Degenthal! This is indeed a great surprise and a real pleasure."

A flood of recollections seemed to choke the utterance of the director, but he put out both his hands, which the young count shook heartily, adding, "I saw you riding this morning, and your features seemed familiar to me."

"The snow has fallen here since those days," said the director with a smile, as he passed his fingers through his hair. "I would not have recognized you, count, which at your time of life is a compliment. How is the countess, your mother? I owe her a world of gratitude." The voice of the strong man trembled with tender recollection.

"Thank you, my mother is quite well. We still live in our Moravian home. It is merely my university course that separates us at present."

"And now you are enjoying the sweets of student life; that is right. Does your old chaplain still live with your family? He once had the goodness to write to me, but my wandering life makes me one of the poorest of correspondents."

“ Oh, certainly ; we would not know how to do without him. We have often thought of you, and spoken of those days we spent together in Switzerland. Was that Miss Nora who accompanied you this morning ?” asked the young man, with a slightly heightened color, which came and went like a girl’s.

“ Yes ; that was my daughter, whom my recent marriage enabled me to bring home from the convent where she was educated.”

A perplexed expression passed over Degenthal’s countenance, which did not escape Karsten’s notice. An embarrassing pause followed, broken by the latter remarking, “ Even in a wandering life one needs a home as one grows old.”

“ Accept my congratulations ; but Miss Nora ? May I be permitted to renew our former acquaintance ?”

“ If you will do us the honor. For the present we are stopping at the hotel, but I have hired a villa, where my wife and daughter will remain for some time. The wife requires rest, and Nora takes no part in my business.”

“ May I call on her there ?” asked Degenthal with warmth.

“ If you will honor us,” repeated the director, in a tone that showed him determined not to intrude one step on their former acquaintance.

“ At what hour am I most likely to find you and the ladies at home ?” continued Degenthal.

“ The mornings I devote to my business ; the afternoons belong to my family. We shall be glad to see you to-morrow.”

"To-morrow, then, I shall have the pleasure of calling ; in the mean time will you present my compliments to Miss Nora ?"

"My daughter would not forgive me if I failed to tell her of this meeting. She has as vivid a recollection as I of your kindness, count."

While this cordial meeting was taking place the young men at the dining-table were keen observers of the parties, and as Karsten looked in that direction he said, "Count, I think that I observe among your friends a young gentleman to whom I feel indebted on my daughter's account. May I ask you to introduce me to the stout gentleman sitting in the corner ?"

"Oh, my friend, Dahnow. He told me of this morning's accident ; let us go to him. Dahnow, Director Karsten wishes a word with you. Director Karsten, Baron Dahnow, a sturdy scion of the Mecklenburg race."

"If I do not mistake, baron, it was you who came to my daughter's assistance this morning," said the director, bowing with all the grace and ease of an accomplished man of the world.

"Unfortunately my figure makes me easily recognizable. I must acknowledge the soft impeachment ; but the honor was on my side to have assisted so beautiful a lady," said Dahnow gallantly. "If you will accord me the same permission you have granted my friend Degenthal, I shall present myself to receive in person the acknowledgments of the fair lady for my knightly deed."

"Certainly ; it will give me great pleasure to have the quiet lives of my wife and daughter enlivened by your visits, gentlemen."

It was now Dahnow's turn to bow low, which he did, saying, "Pray, join us in drinking to our further acquaintance."

"I should be pleased to accept your kind invitation were it not that business is particularly urgent to-day, and the time is gone by when it would become my gray hairs to join with your young locks. Only once in life does this golden time come, so you will kindly excuse me, count."

Degenthal stretched out his hand, and with a bow to the party of students Karsten took his leave.

"What a handsome man !" said one of the students. "Some suspect that he is a wayward son of a good family, others that he is an officer whose debts have swamped him, while still others say that he is a Jew who has mastered Yankee humbug."

"If he is a Jew, then I am one !" called out a lusty Westphalian, whose light hair and turned-up nose would have cleared him all over the world from any suspicion of Semitic taint.

"Have you ever seen him on horseback ? Why, he is a very centaur, and his skill is no humbug."

"Fatty," called out one of the party, "you are selfishness itself. You might just as well have included us all in the pilgrimage to the shrine of the unknown beauty."

"There was no necessity for a deputation," replied Dahnow curtly.

“ Well, we shall see the beauty, nevertheless,” continued the tipsy-head. “ Degenthal, here’s to your belle. Don’t be so churlish as to hide her from us. Here’s to the health of Miss Karsten.”

Degenthal sprang to his feet and, his eyes flaming, said, “ Sir, you have no right to use the name of a lady—”

What further he wished to say was interrupted by the unaccountable falling of two large decanters among the glasses, scattering them and their contents. Everything was in confusion : the guests inquiring the cause of the accident and the waiters trying to repair the damages. In the *mêlée* Dahnow took his friend by the arm, saying, “ Come, there has been enough of this. A little fresh air and an honest glass of beer will do you good. Come before the others notice us.”

For a moment Degenthal hesitated, and then concluded to do as requested.

“ You can pay for the glasses ; my part was to keep the peace unbroken,” said Dahnow with his habitual dryness as they left the dining-room.

“ Dahnow, did you do it purposely ?”

“ How else could I silence your parliamentary harangue ?”

“ But why did you interrupt me ? It’s shameful to use a young lady’s name in this manner. I cannot conceive why you should object to my expressing my views on the subject.”

“ In the first place, because words spoken in wine should not be noticed ; in the second, because I have

too much respect for any woman, no matter what her position, willingly to drag her name into a student's brawl. Do you imagine that it would have reflected any credit on Miss Karsten to have you pick a quarrel on her account?"

Degenthal was silenced by the correct reasoning of his friend, but chafing inwardly, he resumed the conversation by asking, "Why do you lay such stress on whatever her position is?"

"Because her father's business leaves her open to certain familiarity."

"But she was never connected with it. From her earliest childhood she was taken away and educated in one of the most exclusive of Belgian schools. Her mother was a woman of the greatest refinement, whom my mother tended in her last moments, which was the origin of our acquaintance. Her father has got ample means to give his daughter an independent position."

"Notwithstanding all of which the poor girl is in a trying place. Are you really going there to-morrow?"

"Certainly; nothing more natural. My mother will, no doubt, be pleased to hear of little Nora, in whom we all took so deep an interest."

Dahnow did not seem to be quite so confident of the countess's extreme joy, and said in his half ironical manner, "Well, it is a complicated matter, and if I were blessed with a mother I rather think I should consult her."

CHAPTER V.

FACING the city lay one of those charming villas, such as the poetic mind of the German knows how to create, a gem set in circlets of climbing plants and nestling on a green, shady lawn, which was broken by gorgeous and odorous flower-beds. Many such residences form a continuous chain along the suburban roads of Heidelberg, inhabited by those who seek to unite the social enjoyments of the city with the love of nature and its refining influences. Each villa has as many windows as possible looking on the beautiful river, whose waters are so dear to every Rhinelander.

Karsten had hired one of these home nests for the summer months, and there installed his wife and daughter, surrounding them with all the comforts and luxuries in which self-earned fortune so often revels, in contradistinction to inherited means, which seems satisfied with what time has meted out. There is more reason in each of these characteristics than may at first appear. The consciousness of having earned what he possesses, and the feeling of the power to increase it, makes a man more reckless in spending. The labor of acquiring calls for necessary recreation, while the fact of having fortune transmitted breeds a sense of responsibility of keeping it intact.

The one state also calls for a certain exterior show in

asserting itself, with which the other can dispense, its place and rank having by circumstances been assigned to it.

Nora was seated in her favorite corner of the cosey *boudoir* opening off the drawing-room, which commanded the best view. It was the month of May. Six months had passed since she had taken leave of her beloved convent. She was dreaming of bygone days, and smiled as she reviewed these months and failed to find in them any of the snares and dangers which her desire for an earnest life had pictured to her imagination. Her father had received her with the greatest tenderness, his sole thought seeming to be to surround her with everything she could wish. Her young step-mother was an amiable, harmless little body, very much occupied with a sense of the change in her new position, which her golden hair and blue eyes had won for her, much to the envy of her old associates of the ring. The director had spoken the truth when he gave as an excuse for his second marriage his desire to make a home for his daughter. He longed to have once more a place where he could take refuge from the trials of his wandering career, but he was now too old to seek it in a circle congenial to his own birth and his daughter's education, so his choice, perforce, had to be made from a profession not bearing the highest reputation for modesty.

Madame Emilie realized that her best policy was to win the good will of her step-daughter ; and, indeed, she was too light-hearted and indifferent to feel any

serious unfriendliness, and Nora's naturally good disposition met her half way. What her father's wife lacked in refinement Nora tried to think was compensated for by her genial, amiable ways; and a certain respect for the superiority of her daughter maintained a degree of restraint in her presence which kept concealed many failings of Madame Emilie. Altogether Nora had so far found her changed life very agreeable. The constant going from city to city amused her and prevented her feeling the absence of congenial companionship, and the luxury with which she was surrounded blinded her to her real social position.

Now for the first time since Nora's return from school the family was settled down to domestic life. Madame Emilie gladly abandoned all direction of the household to her step-daughter, much preferring to give herself up to unalloyed pleasure; and Nora, who inherited much of her father's executive ability, entered into her duties with delight, and soon regulated everything with good taste. The director was only occasionally at home, his presence being required wherever his circus was being exhibited.

Nora's happiness was complete when she became the possessor of a beautiful horse, and this was the only point on which she had not followed the advice of her old friend, the Superior. Having, after dwelling on all her father's love and generosity toward her, written of her latest prize, the Mother Superior had replied with strange earnestness, "Would it not be better, dear child, that you should under the circumstances entirely

abstain from this pleasure?" For the first time the young girl put aside a letter from her cherished instructress, and her pretty lips pouted impatiently, while a big tear filled her eye. She was her father's daughter, and the love for, as well as the wonderful dexterity in managing horses in her extreme youth, now seemed to return with redoubled force. Her good sense made her see the reason of her friend's advice, but it is so easy to find arguments in favor of carrying out what we wish. She replied, "Oh, leave me this pleasure; it seems to bring me so near to my dear father." Nora did not hear the deep sigh which followed the reading of this letter, and the nun never again alluded to the subject.

It was true that "it brought her so near to her dear father." Karsten was never so much in love with his daughter as when he saw her on horseback and proudly recognized her equestrian talent. He could not repress a slight regret when he remembered his promise to his dead wife, but he never mentioned it. A new era seemed to dawn on Nora's existence. What had mystified her seemed to have vanished, and a something for which we have no name gave to her countenance an undimmed brilliancy. Early on the day of which we are writing she had ridden and managed her spirited horse with artistic skill; she had seen to all the cares of her household, and when we saw her in her favorite corner she held a pious book, for she was scrupulously exact in following the advice of the convent to let nothing interfere with her daily devotions. The bright May

morning was not, however, conducive to study, and every few minutes she raised her head and gazed on the smiling landscape, while her hand toyed with the foliage which peeped in at the window. Suddenly she turned round as some one entered the *boudoir*, and said cordially, shutting up her book and advancing to meet him, "I am so glad that you are come at last, Count Degenthal. It is out of the question to apply one's self this sunny day."

"Then I may enter," replied the newcomer; "but, pray, do not let me disturb you from your pet corner."

"You are right," she assented; "there is no other such nook for a genuine gossip."

"But why should the sunshine disturb you?" the young man asked, as he raised the discarded volume; and looking at it, added, "Miss Nora, you make one feel ashamed to see you with such a serious work."

"It is necessary for me as a counteracting force. The only thing I have to complain of is the total lack of earnestness in my life. You are the only one who speaks seriously to me." She said this with such an innocent, frank look in her eyes, it quite touched the young man. He replied:

"Seriousness and I are strangers. My life were lost in amusement did not my college life claim some of my attention; but you have only just escaped from the school-room. You complained of a want of something to read, so I have brought you something appropriate to this bright May morning."

"Have you brought me something to read?" seizing

the pretty gilt volume. "I have nothing but my school books. But do you think that I can read this?" she asked timidly.

The young man did not smile at the frank question, for he understood the fears with which her careful education filled her soul, and the most brilliant repartee would not have raised her in his estimation as did this childlike scrupulousness.

"Even my mother would recommend this to you," he replied. "It is a volume of extracts from our best poets. I have already enjoyed some of them with you. Do you not recollect this?" He read well with a remarkably sweet voice, and Nora was a good listener. His choice was a melancholy theme. Youth seems to love the sad as much as age seeks what is joyful, but the deep meaning was fully appreciated by the poetic nature which Nora inherited from her Irish mother. Degenthal knew how to lay stress on the best parts, and words and thoughts were woven in an imperceptible web. As they sat together, their hearts responding to a sympathetic appreciation, they little dreamed of the power that was encircling them with a magic far subtler than poet's words or May-time flowers.

First love is heaven's breath that binds soul to soul, scarcely conscious of how the soft glance and the hand-touch thrills. No later love, though, perhaps, truer, deeper, and more lasting, leaves the same remembrance.

For several weeks Degenthal had found himself so much at home in the director's villa that he was hardly

conscious of how much time he spent there. In the first visit, which he made with Dahnow, Nora was so governed by that shyness which a renewed friendship often causes, that he had said with more or less disappointment, "Well, this school-girl, with her hair in Madonna bands low on her temples, is surely no siren. She does not at all look like a poor, unprotected damsel to be rescued from the fangs of a cruel step-mother. Indeed, the little blonde rather seems to stand in awe of her daughter than the reverse. In our rank-levelling days," he continued to himself, "it is not worth while to lose one's time with an awkward girl among circus girls."

About this time Dahnow had gone home to his family. Notwithstanding that Nora did not prove very *piquante* at their first meeting, Degenthal could not divest himself of a certain interest with which their first acquaintance and her strange story surrounded her, nor of a feeling of responsibility when he thought of the mother's death-bed.

Had the circus-rider's daughter been less pretty, we will not undertake to say that this feeling of responsibility would have weighed so heavily; but he found her not only adorned with all the beauty which nature could bestow, but possessing all the graces which a good education gives, and that ease which is so appropriately called "good style." Degenthal's early life being passed essentially under female influence, made him easy in woman's company, and the events of their childhood's acquaintance could not help creating some-

thing of a brotherly confidence in their present intercourse.

Madame Emilie, flattered by the honor of having a count on their visiting list, at first tried to intrude herself on them ; but Curt's whole manner was so different to what she had been used to, that she soon preferred to absent herself, and the young people were left to enjoy the company of each other. The serious tone which their intimacy took might have astonished lookers-on, but, as we have already said, " youth seems to have a fondness for what is sad." Both were of earnest natures, and did not enjoy the superficialities of the majority of the frequenters of the director's villa.

Nora's education made her view life from the same standpoint as Curt, and the customs and manners of which he spoke were those for which she was prepared. That which recommended the man most to her was his clear, firm faith, and the unostentatious manner in which he acquitted himself of life's duties. Her deep, religious training had impressed her with the conviction that this alone could sustain one. Her step-mother had belonged by turns to so many different sects that she scarcely knew what she believed, and her father's mode of life had long since obliterated from his mind any pious sentiments left by the edifying example of his first wife. Nora's fondest hope was that she might be instrumental in leading him back and reawakening in him these sentiments at some future time. It was pleasant to confide this hope to Curt, and to find him enter into her thoughts with a readiness which sprang

from the long-cherished idea that he was destined to be her protector. Often he wondered over her future, but this was the one subject to which he never alluded. Indeed, everything seemed so unreal to Curt that he determined to enjoy the present to its full. He had written to his mother the particulars of his meeting with Nora, but she had treated it in her reply in such a commonplace manner that he made no further mention of his continued visits.

By degrees the number of visitors at the villa increased. Nora knew too little of life to remark that they were only gentlemen, and that for the most part they belonged to the student class, which, however attractive, is not always bound quite strictly by the accepted rules of exclusive society.

Madame Karsten was delighted to see herself surrounded by worshippers and admirers who appreciated her pretty toilets, nor was it disagreeable to the director to find such pleasant society in his occasional visits to his home.

Nora took no pleasure in the public entertainments which were so much to her step-mother's taste. It is quite true that she was strengthened in this indifference by a look from Curt on one occasion, when there was question in his presence of attending some exhibition. She liked much better to join her young acquaintances in excursions by land or water to many of the picturesque spots in the neighborhood, and it became tacitly understood that Curt should always be of the party. He exercised a kind of brotherly protection over her,

and his presence seemed to give her a feeling of security ; indeed, his respectful manner to her and to Madame Karsten impressed the other young men with a like sentiment.

Weeks went by in this fashion, each visit bringing its own pure, ingenuous pleasure. Toward the close of the month of May it was proposed to make an excursion to Rolandseck. Madame Emilie, her pretty hat with its tiny red feather partly concealing her blond locks, looked so pretty that she attracted general attention, and the young men were constantly by her side ; her little *nez retroussé* seemed to harmonize well with her pert answers and gay laugh. Occasionally she approached rather near to the boundary line of good manners, for dignity was not natural to her, and it was somewhat of a relief to her when her daughter's quick steps rather left her behind.

Nora walked fast, for she always had a fancy to enjoy the first impression of a fine view undisturbed. She and her inseparable companion soon stood by that stone arch which commands a view of the rapid stream and the peaceful island, the panorama of wood and hill, city and village ; in a word, that indescribable mingling of nature's charms and man's activity. Curt did not seem as much impressed as usual with the landscape, but rather gazed steadfastly on his companion, whose eye was riveted with a strange expression to one spot, apparently forgetful of everything else. Nora had retained a great deal of the simple style of dress of her school days ; simple, indeed, was the untrimmed trav-

elling dress and the broad-brimmed hat which shaded her face, as well as the close-cut bang, to which Baron Dahnow objected so decidedly. She was pretty, but it was as yet the beauty of maidenhood, yet undeveloped like that of the unopened bud, which shrinks from rather than attracts the eye.

Curt found something so strange and inexplicable in her expression, that he looked steadfastly at the dreamy profile which stood out in relief. Suddenly perceiving a tear-drop fall from the long eyelashes, and silently creep down her cheeks, he leaned forward and said timidly, "Nora!"

She looked at him, her eye moist yet, but a smile on her lip as she said, "True knight! True brotherly love! The poor knight of Toggenburg!"

Curt drew back; the words disturbed him, and he said, a little annoyed, "Why do you say that? Miss Nora, have you thought of it?"

"Thought of what?" she replied innocently. "On the noble knight of Toggenburg? No; I only was repeating the passage which has been so often quoted on this spot; but let me tell you where my thoughts were. The old cloister down there with its little cross awoke longing memories of my dear convent."

"And did they remind you of the knight's cruel lady love?"

"Why cruel? Is it so wonderful to love God so much as to know no other love? I have a friend who does so. There can surely be nothing so beautiful or so blessed," replied Nora, and out of her

eyes shone something like the longing which she mentioned.

This sentiment struck Curt as strange, and he replied with a slightly ironical tone, "I believe you would be capable of keeping a knight in similar suspense."

"Oh, the poor Toggenburger! He was a little tedious with his eternal watching," she said, smiling. "What did we read yesterday? That there was something else to do in this life besides love-making."

"But if a man cannot overcome it?" queried Curt.

"Man must understand," said Nora, with all that decision and energy of youth that has never known what obstacles mean, "that one must not strive for a heart that belongs to God."

"But, Miss Nora!" remonstrated Curt, unable to say more.

"It might have been better for me," she muttered to herself, as an expression of weariness came over her face.

Just then the voices of the rest of the party were heard, and Nora sprang to meet her step-mother at the foot of the mountain, questioning her as to the cause of the delay with all that easy grace which even as a child she possessed. After the fatiguing walk every one was glad to lie on the grass or to rest on the stones of the old ruin. *Maitrank* was passed around, songs were sung, bright maidens brought spring flowers and ivy wreaths to deck the strangers' bonnets and button-holes. From far down the river came the echoes of music and gay voices, such as is heard in all its contagion on the Rhine.

Of all the gay party Curt alone remained silent. Nora's words had awakened ideas and feelings of which he could not rid himself. Could she be longing for the convent? Could this be her choice? Was this the cause of her peculiar ease of manner? He had often heard it said that it was generally the gayest-hearted who entered convents. But why should such a decision on her part affect him? Would it not be, as she herself had said, the happiest thing for her, the safest haven from the world's storms?

These thoughts disturbed him. What! must this lovely being shut herself up from the world because there seemed to be no place suitable to her here? Must she be buried behind convent walls because there was no place to claim her?

Curt had been educated to hold the religious life in high respect, but when it related to Nora, the only view he could take of it was as "high walls and being buried alive," and the idea that she might choose it as a refuge from her disagreeable position took possession of his mind. The
old
Cant.

As they crossed the Rhine ferry she sat opposite him. She had laid aside her hat; her hands rested in her lap, and her features had assumed that pensive expression which is so often the accompaniment of evening twilight and the monotonous motion of sailing. To Curt's imagination she seemed already a nun. It was like the embodiment of his thoughts; he saw nothing but resignation and sacrifice in her features. His heart shrank within him, and bending toward her, he

whispered, "Do not go into a convent, Nora ; do not go."

Nora looked at him frightened and bewildered. In every girl's heart there lies something which tells her when she has it in her power to tease a man. She looked at him, and with a smile said, "Why not? It is surely the better part."

Curt was silent. He was half conscious that he had done something stupid, and on the arrival of the ferry was glad to get away by pleading a headache, which was sustained by his former silence. But in his dreams that night those thoughts with regard to Nora disturbed him. He saw her behind barred windows, and felt, without knowing how, that he alone could rescue her. Perhaps he would have slept better had he known how long Nora lay on her pillow with open eyes and burning cheeks, asking herself the question, "Why does he not wish me to enter a convent?"

CHAPTER VI.

DAHNOW had just returned to Heidelberg after an absence of three months. Looking around him, at the little welcoming party which surrounded him, he asked, "Where is Degenthal?"

Amid a general shrugging of shoulders and many meaning smiles a voice answered, "Oh, Degenthal has something else to do ; he is rarely to be seen nowadays."

"Love, love ; thou art so sweet !" called out another student, placing his hand dramatically over his heart.

"What does all this mean ? What have you all done to Degenthal ?" called out Dahnow, looking around him impatiently.

"We have done nothing to him ; it is he who is so occupied that he is rarely visible. Probably he is studying the fine arts in the villa."

"Absurd !" broke in the Westphalian. "You are worse than a set of gossiping old maids. Some of you fellows were also pretty frequent visitors at the villa. Can't one look at a pretty girl without setting every one talking ?"

"It depends on how often one looks. Degenthal allows himself that pleasure without stint."

"Now, that is an exaggeration. He has been on a little trip up the Rhine, otherwise he would have been here to see you, Dahnow, for he often speaks of you."

Dahnow breathed easier. He had not heard from Degenthal while he was away, and although a constant correspondence is not necessary to male friendships, he could not shake off a certain feeling of suspicion. He did not dare ask any more questions, and left the little company accompanied by one of the students, who said to him, "Clement, you might speak to Degenthal. Your parents were old friends. I did not want to say so before the others, but I do not like to see him spending so much time in that villa and leaving old friends."

"What villa?" asked Dahnow.

"Now, now, you know well; the circus-rider's family. That is no society for him, no matter how much style they put on. The girl is pretty; I have seen her ride, but it would be a shame if Degenthal should commit himself."

"Oh, is that all?" said Dahnow. "He knew her family long ago; an accident introduced her into the family of the countess. It is a case of childhood's friendship."

"Childhood's friendship be hanged! Put fire and straw together, they will burn. Warn him! Warn him!"

"Have you visited the family?" asked Dahnow.

"No; some of our fellows go there. They are decent enough people; I have nothing to say against them or the girl, but in our country people associate with their equals, and it prevents much unpleasantness. Nothing can come of Degenthal's intimacy but harm to the girl

or to him." It was seldom that the Westphalian spoke so much, but now he was all excitement.

"Ah, nonsense! You Westphalians seal yourselves hermetically. Others do not presume to be so exclusive," said Dahnow, affecting an indifference he did not feel.

"So far we have had no reason to regret it. Do as you will; I have said my say."

"Well, well, we shall see. Degenthal knows what he is doing," answered Dahnow, to satisfy his adviser.

The Westphalian shrugged his shoulders as he moved away, leaving Dahnow not so unmoved as he pretended. "I shall attend to the fellow," soliloquized he. "He is the stuff to be guilty of such a stupid trick. He is too good to be fast, and too sentimental to be prudent."

The "attending to him" was not so easy, for several days passed without his seeing Degenthal. Every time he called at his quarters he received the same answer, "Not at home." Dahnow tried to persuade himself that his friend had come to his senses and gone for a trip; but he decided, nevertheless, to look for him at the villa, where he considered he was privileged to call. One afternoon he put his outer man in the best trim and started to make his visit.

The lady of the house gave him a warm welcome, and inquired most cordially of his home and his trip. Some geographical errors he corrected politely, and ever brought the quick-running tongue of his host back to the desired point, but to all leading questions she seemed reserved and gave no information. In vain Dahnow's

gray eyes wandered over the large drawing-room, until they chanced to look through the bay-window into the garden where he recognized two tall figures talking earnestly together. The lady followed his gaze and said, "Your friend is here, and will be glad to meet you. What a serious man he is ! I run away from him and my daughter when they have discussions. Shall we call the learned pair," she asked, with a coquettish air, "or shall we leave them to their discussion ?"

A further *tête-à-tête* with the amiable baron, who said trifles so well, would have pleased her, but the latter cleverly concealed the real object of his visit by expressing a wish to pay his respects to Miss Nora ; so the lady hostess skipped to the window with simpering grace in order to summon her step-daughter.

"Now you must become serious," she said, as she looked at him with childish affectation. She seemed to think that the *naïve* style would please him. "Now, *sauve qui peut*, I hope that we shall see you often," she said poutingly, as she left the room.

There was more surprise than pleasure indicated in Degenthal's countenance as he recognized his friend. It was lost on Dahnow, for he was looking at Nora, who greeted him in a most friendly manner, quite different from the stiff, formal being on whom he had so summarily passed sentence in their earlier acquaintance. Her figure seemed more graceful ; could it be the effect of her light summer dress ? Was it the arrangement of her dark hair, which was drawn from her forehead and fell in soft curls on her slender neck ? Each line and

fold evinced the truly womanly desire to please. Her eyes shone so brightly, her lips smiled so sweetly, that it seemed to Dahnow that he had never seen anything so charming.

"You have come back sooner than you intended. I could not fancy why we were ordered in," said Degenthal, as he laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Sooner!" repeated Dahnow, and his eye, which wandered from Nora to his friend, had a twinkle which, notwithstanding his phlegmatic nature, would often light up his face. "So soon! The three months must have passed delightfully to you, and you could not have missed me much. Have you not received a pack of my cards? For the last week I have sought in vain to find you at home."

"Indeed?" said Degenthal absently. He seemed to have eyes only for Nora, who had wandered into the bay-window. "Yes; I was away. I was busy, and did not hear of your return."

"I have made the mortifying discovery that you can live without hearing of me. Miss Nora, what witchery did you use that my friend was so dumb? Or was he so studious that he deserted you?"

"Oh, no; Count Degenthal has been a true friend to us," she replied. "He has been here nearly every day. I hardly know how the days have passed." She seemed suddenly conscious of Dahnow's sharp look, and blushed slightly, adding, "The summer has flown in this picturesque neighborhood like a dream."

"Why like a dream?" broke in Degenthal abruptly.

"Because we are so soon to strike our tents, and then it will all be so different."

There was something like complaint in the ring of her voice. Degenthal looked inquiringly at her, and a question seemed to hang on his lips. Dahnow began to feel that he was in the way.

Suddenly Degenthal jumped up and said a little rudely, "Well, you do not seem to have much to relate of your trip. I cannot remain longer. Miss Nora, my compliments to your mother. If I do not see you this evening, I shall certainly to-morrow. Then you must explain."

For a moment her hand rested in his, and he said, "You will not leave as soon as you seem to think. *Au revoir!*" Dahnow was taken completely by surprise by this hasty retreat. He intended to approach the subject near his heart on their walk home, but his friend had disappeared. The description which he tried to give Nora of his trip did not seem to be very interesting, for her eyes were steadfastly turned from him and fastened on the garden, through which Curt's elastic figure was disappearing. Was it merely unintentionally that she pressed the carnation which she had brought in from the garden to her lips, as if she would swallow every atom of perfume?

Clement Dahnow had many thoughts, but the one uppermost in his mind was the wish that he had been the giver of the flower which was so affectionately pressed to that pretty mouth. Two hours later he walked up and down his room in a state of excitement.

He was a true North German, who reviews all those weighty considerations under the cover of his own roof, while the Southerner prefers to think them over in the open air. His room was filled with comforts, another sign of the Northerner, who even to student life brings some of his characteristic love of home thrift. Heretofore he had been in the habit of looking on all disturbing questions extended cosily on his sofa and through the smoke of his Havana ; but to-day all his composure had left him, and in spite of the late summer sultriness he was excited, "something must be done !" he said to himself, "something must be done ! We must not allow this young fellow to be so mad ! He cannot think of marrying or of making the girl miserable. Something must be done !"

The often-repeated "Something must be done !" seemed to direct his steps toward the writing-table, as if the "something" was to be found there. "I must write to his mother. Friendship requires it. Perhaps she may know what to do," he soliloquized as he sat down. "When a man is brought up under petticoat government, he easily becomes the victim of the first tempter he meets." No sooner was this sentence uttered than he repented of it as he thought of Nora's charms. She, at least, did not come under that title. "Surely," he continued, "she could make a philosopher go mad ; but so much the more reason that Curt should not make her miserable ; and his position forbids that he should marry her."

It is possible that Baron Dahnow's allusion to "posi-

tion'' came from the idea he had always nursed, that he was absolved from such a responsibility. He belonged to an old family ; his parents died when he was young, and he became owner of a large property. As the older brothers had taken care of propagating their name through suitable marriages, he felt he owed nothing to his family, and could follow his own choice.

Strangely enough, such purposeless single men often make the best marriages. Dahnow seemed at this moment not to be troubled by his own love affairs, for he rose from his reveries to active service for his friend. His mother must know ; it was his conscientious duty to tell her. She must call him home. Such dreamers forget easily, but she would never forgive him as an old friend were he not to warn her of what was passing. A circus director's daughter ! That would be a tit-bit for the proud countess.

Finally Baron Dahnow sat down before his writing-table with a deep sigh. He held his pen irresolutely in his hand some time before his thoughts seemed to come. Then he wrote quickly, and having signed his name, he threw the pen down with the words, " It is the devil's own work, this tale-bearing, but when it is necessary it must not be half done. It is better that those hopes, which I gathered from the step-mother the young count has been giving, should be nipped in the bud. The husband, too, pleased me. He has the right to protect his child from disappointment."

Dahnow seized anew his pen and wrote a second letter, which seemed to be somewhat more difficult than

the first. As soon as it was finished, signed, and sealed, he gave both to his groom, with a hurry foreign to his nature, to dispatch. Then, drawing a long breath, he threw himself into the easiest arm-chair, took a cigar, and assured himself for the tenth time that he had acted right ; and yet, to see him, one would not have supposed it, he looked so unhappy. " Hang me if I don't make the fellow confess to-morrow and listen to reason !" was the last resolution come to by the honest Mecklenburger at the close of this annoying day's work.

It is not so easy, however, to carry out resolutions which depend on another. " The fellow " did not come when expected, and now that the letters were beyond recall he was doubly anxious to try to influence his friend. After some days he went up to Degenthal's " booth," which was the student expression for room. It was open, and he found him leaning against the window, lost in thought, with his head between his hands.

The latter turned round with a questioning look as he heard the step, and threw himself on Dahnow's neck, exclaiming, " You, my best friend, from whom I wish to conceal nothing, are the first one to wish me joy. Clement, she is mine. I possess her heart. She has loved me since childhood. I am so happy now that there is no more uncertainty, and that we understand each other."

" What uncertainty ? Understand who ? Are you mad ? Of whose love are you speaking ?" said Dahnow, roughly releasing himself.

"Yes ; mad from happiness !" answered Curt, his eyes glowing. "Of whose love do I speak ? Well, have you not suspected ? Have you remarked nothing ? Of course, I speak of Nora. Have you ever seen a more beautiful creature ? Do you know a more lovely, amiable being ? And she is mine !"

"Are you stark mad and blind that you do not see what a senseless path you are entering ?" blustered Dahnow. "Must you be told to your face that you have no right to win the love of a girl whom you cannot marry ? You, the Count Degenthal, she a circus director's daughter ! Have you taken leave of your senses ?"

Degenthal drew himself away and said bitterly, "Can you not leave me my little hour of happiness ? I know all. I know what is coming. I did think that I might have one day's bliss. It was only this morning we understood each other and spoke our thoughts, and that the struggle was ended. Oh, it was a weary time !"

"Time is the only remedy for such madness," muttered Dahnow, as he took a seat. Degenthal did not seem to hear him, but pushed back his chair as he walked to the window, saying, "I did not believe it. I feared she had another idea, with which I would not have dared interfere."

A sceptical smile passed over Dahnow's lips.

Degenthal continued, "Particularly when she seemed so reserved and cold ; but she only feared to betray her love." His face gleamed with pleasure as he continued,

"I feared to admit to myself that she had selected the cloister, for I felt in my heart that she alone could satisfy the cravings of my soul. Were it not for this I would long since have declared my intentions and saved her much unhappiness."

"I cannot understand," said Dahnow, "how you can so easily alter your principles."

"Principles!" cried Degenthal. "There is one thing stronger than principle. That is love; and when it does not lead us to evil, there is no need for any inconsistency of principle. In my case there is a wonderful dispensation. Nora as a child was in a measure brought to me and placed in my arms when she was worse than an orphan. Her mother gave me her dying blessing, and from that moment I felt responsible for her daughter's fate. Her education was then decided on, and was such as to lift her out of the circle in which she was born. To-day she is the equal of any one. I have reflected on it all. Perhaps you took me for a scoundrel who would win her love unworthily." He glared at his friend angrily.

Dahnow remained silent a moment. He was taken aback. All day he had been considering how he could elicit his friend's secret, and now he had it, as it were, thrown at him. All his counsels had been set aside. Instead of warning against an impending danger, a nameless something, he stood face to face with an accomplished fact, and instead of a frightened, wavering penitent, Curt stood like one who had done the most sensible and praiseworthy thing in the world. Dahnow

did not know what more to advance, and merely said laconically, "And your mother?"

"Yes, my mother, that is the point ; it will be dreadful to her. On her account I struggled hard with myself. If it were only my own happiness, I could perhaps be able to make the sacrifice, but Nora is to be considered ; her whole future is in question. Were my mother to see her and know her, she would see that she is separated from us only by accident, and that she is in all things a daughter to her taste."

"But your mother had other plans for you which are very important to your family."

"I allow no one to decide my future !" said Degen-thal haughtily. "If my mother considers the difficulties insurmountable, my younger brother can take the property. His portion will be sufficient for me. Nora is all to me."

"Curt, for Heaven's sake, think what you are doing !" cried Dahnow. "Do not act under the impulse of your enthusiasm. Listen to reason."

"I am not fanatical ; I am as cool as you, but say your say, and I will thank you for it."

Curt seated himself opposite his friend. Dahnow, who at least wished to do his duty, and had now recovered his composure, said all that could be said and that had been said a hundred times in similar cases. He said it better than it is generally said, because he spoke coolly and without exaggeration, with the conciseness of truth ; but he spoke with the usual result, when the strongest words fall as a drop of water

on a heated stone, fizzing for a moment, but not cooling.

"I have considered everything, and will conquer all obstacles," was the only and oft-repeated reply.

"But how will you manage with her father?" asked Dahnow.

"I have, of course, written to her father; he must have my letter by this. Do you suppose that Nora is the girl to keep such a connection secret for an hour?"

"All right," sighed Dahnow, pleased to think that the director would be prepared.

"I shall write to my mother to-day and tell her everything, only begging her not to come to any decision until she sees Nora."

"She will not see her, or I do not know your lady mother. But it is useless to argue with you," said Dahnow, as he got up. "It is incomprehensible how a man can build his whole future on the foundation of a moment's enthusiasm."

"A moment's enthusiasm!" cried Degenthal. "You call that which has been buried deep in my heart for weeks and months, and which I believe so real and so true that it cannot change, a moment's enthusiasm? It is the only thing which can brighten my future life. Such moments are turning-points in our destiny. If there be such another pair of eyes, old fellow, I tell thee to look into them and see what such moments can accomplish."

With these words Curt laid his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder, and said, "Come, now, give me one word of congratulation."

"I cannot congratulate you on your foolishness," replied Dahnow decidedly. "Clothe it as poetically as you wish, do what you will, I can say nothing else."

Notwithstanding the severity of his words, he shook his friend's hand, and with a warm pressure took leave of him. Dahnow was young himself, and although he called his friend's step folly and madness, he possessed that same madness in his own soul which makes men look on life through others' eyes. "If there be another pair of eyes," Curt had said to him; and the next day he caught himself more than once thinking if he ever had seen such loving, innocent eyes, set beneath such graceful arches and lighting such clear-cut features. The thought took such possession of him that night and day, it followed him until he was on the point of saying to Curt, "Lucky dog!" but he repressed the fascination, and said to himself, "Folly, folly! I hope no harm will come of it. I wash my hands of the whole affair."

CHAPTER VII.

CLEMENT DAHNOW loved his comfort, but, above all, he liked his undisturbed mornings. The day on which he was robbed of his usual sleep, his coffee, his paper, and everything were failures. Degenthal's scrape had interfered with his mental quiet, and now it seemed to threaten his ease and comfort. A few days after the conversation detailed in the last chapter Degenthal stormed into his room in spite of the valet's protestations.

Dahnnow's first impulse was to renew his arguments against the love affair, but a look at Degenthal silenced him. His friend was deathly pale, and with painful excitement held out a letter, so crumpled that it told its own tale, saying, "Read that!" and strode up and down the room.

It is the peculiarity of lovers to impose their troubles on every one. It is comparatively easy to give the expected sympathy under the influence of romantic evening walks or by the inspiration drawn from star-gazing; but the lover must indeed be exacting who expects more than polite attention at seven o'clock in the morning, when you are still toying with your pillow, and the glaring sun is making your eyes blink.

With rather discouraging coldness Dahnnow read the following letter, which bore Karsten's signature :

“While I acknowledge with gratitude, Count, the honor you do me in asking the hand of my daughter, I am pained to be obliged to withhold my consent. I do not for a moment doubt the sincerity of your desire to promote my daughter's happiness, but your youth deceives you. You could never obtain your family's consent to this union, and, putting myself in their place, I consider they are justified, for our positions are so very different ; but, Count, neither can I consent to see my child enter a family where she is not welcome or form a connection which could be only a cause of discord and misunderstanding, the bitter results of which she would have to bear. In the excitement of your feelings you have not weighed the importance of the step.

“My daughter recognizes the justice of my views. I shall not reproach you with not having consulted me before gaining her consent. We elders must not be too exacting with young and loving hearts. I regret my absence from home, as rumors of what has occurred reached me too late. I must request you not to try to change my daughter's decision, or to add to the pain of the course she will pursue. We shall soon leave this neighborhood. Do not try to find her new abode. You will yet thank me for the pain which to-day I am causing.

“In fullest confidence in the sincerity of the honor of your intentions, I have the honor to remain,

“Yours cordially,

“KARSTEN.”

Dahnnow was about to exclaim from the bottom of his soul, “Sensible man !” but, raising his eyes from the

letter, he saw Degenthal standing before him with flashing eyes. He was touched, but his silence did not please the broken-hearted lover, who said :

“ No doubt you find this very sensible ; quite in accord with your own ideas ; but you do not for a moment think of the misery this horse-sense costs us. Oh, how they must have tormented her before they persuaded her !” He threw himself on a chair and covered his face with his hands.

Dahnow walked up and down the room several times, and then, laying his hand on his friend's shoulder as sympathetically as possible, said, “ Poor fellow !” In his heart he felt much more inclined to say, “ Poor girl !” Strange as it may seem, we often sympathize more deeply with the love troubles of the other sex than with those of our own. That longing look after Curt, in which Nora's whole soul appeared to be sunken, came back to his recollection. He could not quite understand how she could feel so. Men find it hard to understand the impression made by other men. But the honest Mecklenburger acknowledged that his friend had gained Nora's love, and his soul went out in pity to her.

“ Now read this,” said Curt, handing a second letter, as he recognized the sympathetic tone of Dahnow's voice. It contained the following short sentences, written in a girl's hand :

“ It was a beautiful, but unfortunate dream. Better that we should part. Farewell. God bless you.

“ NORA.”

Dahnow sighed as there came to him a feeling of being to a certain extent responsible for all this. Both friends remained silent, and the more he thought the more convinced was Dahnow of the justice of his first impression. "She is young ; some other love will console her."

"Old fellow," he said in measured tones, "although for the moment it may seem very hard, her father is right. It is easier to break off now than it would be later."

Degenthal rose hastily, exclaiming, "Do you believe for a moment that I am going to consent to this? Do you suppose that such a thing as this," and he threw Karsten's letter contemptuously away, "is going to weaken my resolution? I would find her if I have to follow her to the North Pole. I know that she loves me, and no one shall separate us."

Dahnow felt tempted to suggest that the winds in that northern climate might be cooling, but his previous remarks not having a happy effect, he refrained ; and Degenthal went on, "I have tried every means to find out her whereabouts, but can only learn that she left yesterday morning early. Oh, that I had not promised Nora not to see her again until we had heard from her father ! Yesterday I called at the post-office and at the telegraph station, thinking that Karsten might have left his address. Now I am starting for the railway station. A man as well known as the director could not leave without being noticed."

"You are out bright and early," muttered Dahnow, still regretting his disturbed slumbers.

Degenthal paid no attention to his ill-humor, but handed him a letter, saying, "I received this yesterday, and must ask a favor of you. My mother writes that she is coming here. I was too excited to understand just the exact time, and besides I may have to leave at once. Will you meet her at the station? Read the letter; it will tell you when to expect her."

Dahnow read this third letter resignedly, and said, "Your mother is not coming to remain; she is merely passing through on her way to Brussels to bring your cousin home from school, and she expects you to meet her at the station and to accompany her."

"That cannot be!" declared Degenthal.

"It will certainly wound your mother deeply to refuse her request."

"Not at all," replied Degenthal. "She will have received my letter by that time and will understand matters."

"It is very questionable whether she will have received your letter," replied Dahnow, although in his heart he suspected that it was the reception of the letter which caused the countess to propose this little trip for her son. "Be that as it may, however, you surely value your mother's good favor too much to give her any unnecessary trouble. It is just as difficult to understand this indifference to her feelings as it was your childish dependence a short while ago."

Sound advice generally makes an impression, even when we are most excited. Degenthal had to acknowledge the truth of this remark, and although he muttered

something of "a more important affair," Dahnow followed up his advantage by suggesting that a day sooner or later could not matter. Karsten was not a man who could disappear without leaving some trace of his destination. He begged Curt to accede to his mother's request, and to watch his opportunity on the trip to win her confidence.

"Well, I shall see," muttered Curt. "At all events, do you go to the station; if possible, I will follow you. I know I can count on you as my friend."

"Oh, Lord, if he but knew all!" thought Dahnow. He then rang impatiently for his valet, plunged his head into a basin of cold water, put on a luxurious dressing-gown and fez, and seated himself to enjoy his coffee. But there is no use fighting fate. The brown nectar gave forth its aroma, the smoke of his Havana curled in the air, the morning paper still lay unfolded, when another guest knocked at the door, and would not be refused. In the worst of tempers Dahnow threw off his fez as the newcomer stood before him. He was a slight man of middle age, whose long, black coat proclaimed his clerical profession even before he announced himself as "Chaplain L——, former tutor of Count Degenthal. My name is probably known to you," said the stranger, "through Curt, as yours is to me, Baron Dahnow, whom I recognize as the count's best friend."

Dahnow's countenance cleared. He had heard too much of the good man not to welcome him cordially.

"No doubt you guess my business," continued the clergyman, coming directly to the point, notwithstanding

ing the shadow which passed over the young man's brow. "In the first place, I am charged to express the warm thanks of the countess for the true friendship for her and her son which your letter shows."

"He would not thank me for it," answered Dahnow sadly. "It is questionable whether it is right to meddle in other people's affairs. Nine times out of ten you make them worse."

"Well, how are things going?" asked the clergyman, without noticing this last remark.

"Good and bad, according to the view we take of them," replied Dahnow. Telling what had happened in the last hour, he added, "Of course at present he is determined not to give the girl up. If the countess expects to influence her son by argument she is entirely mistaken."

"Do you think this is a plot, as the country people say, to catch the young count? What is your opinion of the young lady?" inquired the chaplain.

"With such eyes as hers she has no need to plot to catch," replied Dahnow angrily. "So much I can tell you, sir; and if I were fortunate enough to possess her, the whole world could not induce me to give her up. She is such a woman as a man loves only once in his life. But you probably cannot understand this," added he apologetically, with a pleasant smile, as he remembered that he was addressing a stranger. Dahnow's smile was very winning, and made you forget his gruff moods.

"As a child she was pretty and unusually gifted,"

acquiesced the clergyman. "For her dead mother's sake I take an interest in the child, and it would grieve me to think that the course of education which I had recommended resulted in making her an *intriguante*, as the countess has hinted."

"Who speaks of intrigue?" cried Dahnow. "Why will women always be suspicious? What more natural than that a young man should fall in love with a remarkably pretty girl? Were it not for the undesirable profession of her father, Curt might well be congratulated. I can easily understand what a trial it is to the countess, but I wash my hands of it."

The clergyman looked intently at Dahnow, and a meaning smile played on his lips, as the young man stood at the window with his hands buried in the pockets of his Turkish dressing-gown. He merely said, "I don't know that there is anything for us to do as things now stand. The father has taken it into his own hand, and it is better so. The countess hopes that Curt will not only accompany her to Brussels, but to his home, where other interests and different society will distract him and make him forget the temporary wound."

"Do you approve of this, sir?" inquired Dahnow indignantly. "You must have a poor conception of love."

"You yourself have just said that I probably cannot understand that," replied the clergyman, smiling. "However, experience has taught me that people *do* forget. It would be unfortunate if every youthful im-

pression were ineffaceable. You yourself, baron, expressed something of this nature in your letter."

Dahnow stroked his beard, somewhat embarrassed to find himself caught in his own net.

"The countess," continued the clergyman, "arrived yesterday by the late train at C——. This morning she sent me here to make inquiries of you, which must be my excuse for disturbing you so early. She wished to get some information before noon, and I think I may take her a reassuring message. She proposes to continue her journey to-day, and expects to meet her son at the railway station."

"She had better not count too securely on it," said Dahnow. "I did what I could to induce him, but in his present frame of mind he is capable of anything. But really, sir, you convicted me so clearly of inconsistency that you made me forget the pleasures of hospitality. Your early start must have given you very little time for refreshment. Allow me to offer you some."

Dahnow prided himself on his private cellar and his knowledge of good living. A sign to his valet brought a most tempting little breakfast.

"Here is to our onslaught on love," proposed Dahnow, handing a glass of sherry to the chaplain. "Were I not such a hardened heretic I might envy your calling, which saves you from these troubles."

"I cannot drink to the onslaught," objected his guest. "God knows, were there not such serious obstacles I would not act as I am now doing. I am of

your opinion that it is a bad thing to meddle with other people's affairs. This poor girl had enough to contend with in life without this. May God help her to bear the trial."

"You are very good to say so," said Dahnow reverently, and changing his tone, he added, "Bah! women forget easily and quickly find consolation. We are the greatest sufferers."

In the afternoon he was at the station at the appointed hour, and found Degenthal there with a small traveling satchel. He approached Dahnow and said, "I have decided to join my mother, but I shall be back the day after to-morrow. Meet me here."

There were but a few minutes for an introduction to the countess, and a cordial reception from her, when the train started.

"A resolute face has the lady mother, not to be easily mollified," soliloquized Dahnow on his return to his quarters. "So much the better if the fair cousin prove a charmer. Yet the fellow shows more will than I gave him credit for. Poor Nora! Poor Nora! But, as the chaplain says, it would be unfortunate if every youthful impression were ineffaceable. I have delivered him into the hands of his mother; further I shall not interfere, come what may."

CHAPTER VIII.

DELIVERED into her hands—with these words Dahnow had expressed the sum of the countess's wishes. Like most women who have once obtained complete control, she attributed all subsequent mistakes to a diminution of that authority. At the suggestion of the chaplain, who recognized the young man's lack of decision and self-confidence, Curt had been sent to Heidelberg. The mother had consented very unwillingly, and now it was a comfort to think that the trouble resulted from not following her opinion. It was a hard blow that had struck her. Hers was a nature guided solely by principle ; her every action was ruled by it ; as we have already seen, a stern sense of duty had always been the rule of her life. But in energetic natures, especially in women, there lies danger in what they may consider to come within the sphere of their duties, and how far they try to extend it to others. For them there is but one step to tyranny, if the heart does not lend its softening influence.

Widowed early, the countess had displayed marked ability and unselfish sacrifice in the management of her affairs and the bringing up of her children. All her affection was given to her eldest son, in whose more tender nature she found a sort of completion. She had complete control over him, and, like too many mothers,

forgot that some time a stronger than filial feeling would yield that same allegiance to another. To find that at his first introduction into life he should prove false to her principle lowered him in her estimation. Her maternal vanity would not allow her to attribute this to her want of influence, but rather to the freedom of student life and to intrigue. She was convinced that once in her hands he would be saved, and she considered the battle more than half won when she saw him ready to accompany her on her proposed trip. Dahnow was mistaken. She had just at the moment of departing received her son's letter, and considered his announcement as the climax of his blindness, and not to be entertained for a moment. Accustomed to lose no time in an undertaking, she determined to call her son home. Taking her niece from school was merely an excuse for the trip. In secret she hoped that the presence of a young girl would make home more agreeable to Curt, and furnish her with an excuse to spend the following season in the city. She was one of those who think they can always see the desired success of their plans, but she was clever enough to keep her own counsel, and not a word of her hopes passed her lips on the way. The pleasure she experienced at his consent to accompany her prompted her to act very cordially to Curt, who could not form the slightest idea of whether she had received his letter or not.

She spoke much of the business matter, which was the excuse she made for her desire to have him home, hoping to arouse him from his evident depression.

Karsten's answer, of which the chaplain had told her, she looked on as another move in the intrigue, which she was satisfied she would find means to forestall. For the moment her chief study was not to allow her son out of her sight, for she flattered herself that she could read his thoughts. On the morning of their arrival in Brussels her first request was, therefore, that Curt should accompany her to the convent to bring little Lily home. Curt was not at all disposed to go, but when a great sorrow is upon us it is easy to overlook mere trifling trials. The thought ever present to him was how to find Nora, and how to prove to her and her father that he was determined to overcome all obstacles to the accomplishment of their happiness. He could come to no decision as to the plan of action, and as Heidelberg had become so disagreeable to him, he was indifferent about returning home and thence prosecuting his search. The abode of Karsten could not possibly remain a secret.

In order to avoid all unnecessary altercation, he accompanied his mother to the convent gate, intending to leave her there, making the objection of nuns to male visitors his excuse. The countess insisted, however, on his coming in, as the Superior was an old friend of hers and a distant relative, to whom she desired to introduce him. They crossed the little courtyard, and were received by the portress, who left them in the reception-room while she went to announce them. Both mother and son had too much on their hearts to enter into conversation.

The nun came in to say that the Superior would be down in a few minutes. She was about to leave the room when she was stopped at the door, and a soft voice asked to see the Superior. "Wait here, miss," said the portress; "Mother will be down immediately. You would miss her if you went upstairs. Walk into the reception-room."

"I have merely a word to say to her," answered the stranger; "but there are visitors here; I cannot wait."

At the first word Curt started, and in a moment two pairs of eyes were fastened on each other.

"Nora! Nora!" he cried. "You should not be here; you have no right to be here! I shall appeal to all that is just in the world to prevent it. You are mine! You promised to be mine!" he cried excitedly.

At those words the countess stared in horror. On the threshold she saw standing a beautiful girl, whose hands were passionately clasped by her son. She saw the girl trying to release herself, and then lean fainting against the wall. Curt received her as she fell forward, and he called out to the frightened Sister, "Go, call the Superior! Bring some restorative! See, she has fainted! This young lady is my *fiancée*. I have a right to care for her."

With these words he bore her in his arms to the sofa, from which his mother instinctively rose. The Sister left. This was an unusual scene for the convent, but her woman's nature enlisted her sympathy for the young couple.

Curt knelt by the sofa and called the unconscious

girl by endearing names. He kissed her hands passionately, imploring her to tell him why she had left him. She opened her eyes; the faint had been the result merely of the unexpected meeting. "Curt!" she said, and all the love of her heart sounded in the word, but immediately she sat up and drew herself away from his embrace as her eyes fell on the cold, suspicious face of his mother.

At the same moment Curt turned around and said, "Mother, this is Nora. They tore her from me, but you yourself have restored her to me. It was perhaps hard for you to appreciate her at a distance, and now God has granted that you should see her here, and know how worthy she is of you. A letter from me is on its way to you explaining all. Now we beg your blessing."

"I received your letter," replied the countess in cold tones, "containing folly unworthy of response."

"Mother," cried Curt, "understand that this folly is the happiness of my life, and on it depends all that I wish for. To attain it I am willing to resign everything."

"We have had enough of this," continued his mother. "I do not approve of airing family affairs in the presence of strangers."

With these words she turned away to greet the Superior, who had just entered and viewed the excited trio with astonishment. Nora sprang up and threw herself into her arms.

"What is the matter, my child?" asked the religious kindly.

Curt answered, "Madam, this young lady cannot be lawfully kept here, even at her own request. You have no right to believe her words or to receive her vows. She has been frightened and over-persuaded. This is not her vocation. She herself assured me that her heart belonged to me. Nora, you cannot deny it."

"Who says anything of keeping her, of vows, or of vocation?" asked the nun gently. "This young lady came here with her father because she was at school here for ten years. Her intention was to remain for a few days, and to-morrow was fixed for her departure."

"No, Nora, you must not leave to-morrow! You cannot, surely, be untrue to me! Cannot your love bear the trial? Is it so weak?" cried the young man importunately.

"Count," expostulated the religious, "as long as this young lady is under my protection I cannot permit this language. I know not the cause of your separation nor the obstacle to your reunion. That is a question for her father and your family to settle. Nora, dear, you had better go upstairs when you feel sufficiently recovered."

Nora raised her head meekly, and turning to the countess, said in a trembling, sweet voice, "Madam, I could not have dreamed that our meeting again would be so bitter, you were so inexpressibly good to my dying mother. Do not be cruel to her daughter. It is a terrible thing to cause such unhappiness."

The countess was so angry and embittered that she hardly heard, but replied coldly, "You have woven

your net so deftly around my son that he cares nothing for his mother's feelings."

Nora drew herself up coldly, and said with a proud self-possession, which impressed the haughty countess, "He sought me. It is none of my planning that we meet to day. He is free."

"Mother," pleaded Curt, "do not prevent our happiness. I ask your consent to our union, but if you refuse it, I shall follow my own decision. Nora, say but one word," he continued as he approached the latter; but the religious interfered, saying, "Speak to the father of the young lady, or to her in his presence. Here I cannot permit more. Mr. Karsten is staying at the — Hotel."

Curt looked earnestly at the speaker, and believing that he recognized a sympathizer in her, said to her, "Oh, if you are indeed the true friend that Nora so often described to me, tell my mother how worthy she is to be her daughter."

"She possesses all the graces of mind and body that would grace such a position," said the Superior; "but, dear young friend, there are conditions with which it is difficult to fight without regretting it sooner or later. It might have been better for both had you not met again."

"But," insisted Curt, "it seems that God's providence has brought us together for the third time."

"We are very apt to call that which pleases us providential," replied the religious gently.

"I cannot remain here longer; I wish a carriage called," interrupted his mother.

The Superior was about to ring, but Curt himself went to call a vehicle, and as soon as he had left the room his mother sank on the sofa.

"Clotilde," said the religious, in the confiding tones of their girlhood, "Clotilde, I feel for your trial, and understand your disappointment, but be thankful that your son has chosen no unworthy object for his affection. I have known her from childhood, and were it not for the difference of station he could not have made a better choice. I am as opposed as you can be to one marrying out of his station, but are there no exceptions to be made? The feelings of two such characters as Nora and your son are not fleeting passions. This is the union of two pure, young hearts."

"I never change my principles," said the countess, "particularly with regard to a foolish fancy or a cunning intrigue. This is duty."

"We are apt to call that *duty* which harmonizes with our own feelings, forgetting what we owe to others. Clotilde, do not be hard. You may lose a son instead of gaining a daughter."

"Speak no more of it," replied the countess. "I cannot allow any one to influence me. It is my desire that Lily should hear nothing of the affair. To-morrow I shall send the chaplain for her. I do not feel equal to coming here again. Do not mention my visit to her."

The religious promised as requested just as Curt announced the carriage. As mother and son sat opposite each other they remained silent. Arrived at the hotel, Curt conducted her to the door and drove away.

“What order did my son give?” asked the countess of the porter.

“—— Hotel,” replied the man, and she guessed Curt’s destination.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER the scene in the convent reception parlor Nora was conducted to her old room, which, with tender thoughtfulness, had been prepared for her. Once more she sat on the low bench from which she had so often looked longingly out on the life which now presented so hard a scene to her wounded heart. In a little time it had sent her the greatest height of joy and depth of sorrow which can visit a young heart. The longings of school days passed before her imagination, accompanied by a feeling of defrauded rights. Strongest of all was the thought, "We have met again ! we have met again ! He loves me ! I am all to him !" and the tear-stained face was lighted up by a shy, happy smile as she raised her little hand before her eyes, as though she dared not look on the blissful vision.

In the little room the events of the last few days passed in review before her thoughts. Hardly two weeks had passed since Curt's misunderstanding of her allusion to cloister life betrayed their true feelings to each other, and the hopes and fears which had filled each heart found expression and happy reassurance. Oh, sweet is the moment when first love finds voice, and heart goes out to meet heart ! Did they see no impediment to the realization of their hopes ? Oh, yes ; but what are obstacles in such a moment but so many proofs

of sincerity? Curt saw only a mother's consent to win. He was a free agent. At such times the head may think, but the heart blinds.

Next came a second scene to Nora's recollection. Her father's return home and his displeasure at the result of what he had looked on as a renewal of a childish friendship. How differently he represented the obstacles which she and Curt had looked on only as trifles! How deep the chasm between their social stations! How threatening the anger of his family, how complete the destruction of his life's happiness! She again heard the sentence pronounced by her father, "They will believe we laid unworthy schemes to secure the match; they will see your beauty set as a trap to ensnare him, and a stepping-stone to attain high rank."

This argument was all-powerful with Nora. She shrank with all her soul from the degrading thought. She begged her father to write to Curt what a mistake they were about to make. With a firm hand she added the concluding sentence. This done she turned to her father and said piteously, "Father, take me far from here; the earth burns my feet; let me see him no more. Send me far, far from here, over the sea to the land of my mother, that they may not think me an intriguer."

The agony of his child was heartrending to Karsten, and he bitterly reproached himself for not having been more farseeing. He tried to soothe her wounded feelings. In order to counteract any suspicion of Nora's trying to capture the young count, he decided it best

to leave the neighborhood immediately, and wisely proposed a visit to her former instructress at the convent, where she could calmly consider what course to pursue. The proposition was gladly accepted by Nora, and she and her father lost no time in starting for Brussels, leaving the care of breaking up the temporary home to Madame Karsten.

The kind Mother Superior received her former charge with cordiality, but grieved to see that the troubles which she anticipated for her had come so soon. She heartily approved of Nora's wish to visit her mother's relatives, but the director could not be brought to view the plan favorably, and this was the cause of the unexpected meeting of the young lovers. Perhaps a few days would have saved Nora from Curt's influence, but she viewed the coincidence differently. She was sincere in sacrificing her personal feelings to his supposed happiness, but this morning his words seemed a reproach to her. "Is your love so weak that it cannot bear this trial?" Her sacrifice now looked like weakness, disloyalty, and miserable pride. They had both considered all the obstacles which her father had raised, but they had all yielded to the pleadings of Curt's love. Was it really conducive to his happiness to give him up? What love spoke from his every feature yesterday! She asked herself if *she* was willing to suffer everything for his love, why not give him credit for the same devotion?

Her trembling hands again and again pressed her poor, aching brow as she tried to decide what she should

do.* Give up her love, fly from him, or with him brave all?

Who can say what would have been the outcome of the struggle had not outside influence interfered?

It was the same hour, and the sun's rays cast the same shadows as on that day when Nora was called from the contemplation of the far-off mountain-tops to the Superior. She sat buried in thought, and when summoned to dinner excused herself on the plea of a severe headache, knowing that it would be impossible to see her dear instructress before evening.

Again there was a knock at her door, and a letter was handed in, which she took with much misgiving and a beating heart. The handwriting was unknown to her, but she recognized the count's crown on the seal, and immediately knew that it came from Curt's mother. The countess was one of those natures which find relief only in action. As she sat in the comfortless hotel parlor, knowing well where her son had gone, she was almost in despair. She was overbearing, and could not brook seeing her plans interfered with in the least. The long habit of being supreme and looked up to without question had spoiled her. She wished to act with judgment in the matter, and was puzzled what to decide on as the next step. She was convinced of the uselessness of advising her son; the character which the Superior had given Nora occurred to her, and she asked herself whether one so well brought up, so incapable of deceit, so self-sacrificing would be willing to enter a family where she would not be welcome; or if,

on the contrary, she could not be induced to see how unfortunate this marriage would be for him whom she apparently loved. She decided to write to Nora, appealing to her heart, her reason, and her pride.

With burning cheeks Nora read the letter. After dwelling on the many objections to the union, it said, "Do not rob me of my son. Do not come between him and his mother, which will certainly be the case if he does not obey me. Even if my influence be strong enough to separate you, he would never forgive me. They say you are great-hearted and noble-minded; then renounce this passion, which must encompass his misery. We women are capable of sacrifice. Your word alone can convince him of the chasm which lies between you, and free him from the foolish engagement into which he has entered. Surely the fact that I make this request is the best proof of the respect in which I hold you, and my gratitude to you for granting it will be unlimited."

The ending was cleverly put, but respect and gratitude weigh light in the balance against that which is far dearer to the loving, trusting heart. How could the countess speak of her own heart being robbed, and yet think so lightly of asking this same sacrifice of another?

Nora read and re-read the letter without grasping its meaning. Could it be that she had been nursing impossible hopes?

Suddenly she sprang to her feet as the full import of the countess's words dawned upon her. Could this

cold-hearted woman ask her to be the suicide of her own happiness, and falsely to forswear her loyal love? All the strength of her father's nature arose in her as she exclaimed, "It would be a lie! it would be a lie! for my love is as slow as his to acknowledge any obstacle insurmountable. I feel that I will not lower him. Our thoughts and sympathies are the same. I do not wish to influence his decision, but I will not be false to my own love. He shall never say that I was weak or false."

All former doubts disappeared; with trembling lips and glowing cheeks she seized her pen and wrote, "Your son is free. My father was the first to refuse his consent, and I am always obedient to him. No act or word of mine shall ever influence your son. You know that I fled from him; but I cannot deny the love which he sought, and which I shall ever acknowledge and feel. I shall not part from him with an untruth, for that has never mitigated a sorrow or healed a wound. God's will be done. May He guide our footsteps. My love is strong enough to bear and wait."

Nora sealed her letter, rang the bell, and sent it. She stood a long time at the window, and the echoes of her written words seemed wafted to her, sometimes in earnest, sometimes in mocking tones. She tortured her heart with the questions, Had she acted rightly? Was it her duty to end all this sweet love? Must she consent to the sacrifice? These weary thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of her true friend. Madame Sybille was tired from the duties of the day, and some-

what excited by the scene of the morning in the reception parlor. Such feelings had so long been strangers to her that it was difficult to handle them. But there are hearts that no seclusion can render callous to the sorrows of others. Madame Sybille took the feverish head of the young girl between her hands, looked gently in her eyes, and listened lovingly to the storm which poured from the wounded heart.

“Happily or unhappily, my child, earthly love is neither a virtue nor a fault,” the Superior said soothingly. “You have acted rightly. No one has a right to ask this sacrifice of you. You have asked counsel only of your own heart, and it has proved the best adviser. But do not think, dear, that you are alone in struggling for love ; the strongest and the weakest have done the same. It is no supernatural thing, but one of the sweetest flowers which God places in this weary, earthly pilgrimage. Is this love strong enough to repay you for all the suffering it has brought you, and under the circumstances is sure to bring ? Who can say if the sacrificing of it now might not save you many long years of sorrow in after years ? Oh, yes ; I know love is mighty. Who can say that our Lord has not sent this trial in order to save you from a still greater ? For the second time you have chosen strife instead of peace. May God guide you, my child.”

CHAPTER X.

AS the countess read Nora's letter a smile passed over her lips, and she murmured to herself, "I thought so," perhaps denoting the influence which she gave herself credit for exerting over others. She had been alone for several hours, her son not having returned home since morning, and the chaplain having, at her own request, taken Lily from the convent to see the sights of the city. She did not feel equal to the task of entertaining her young niece, but she occupied the hours with busy thoughts. Before the answer to her letter she had determined on one other alternative to keep the control of things. "One must allow children their toys lest they become obstinate." After coming to this conclusion the wrinkles on her forehead deepened, and she busied herself with making notes on a sheet of paper.

The chaplain and Lily appeared in time for supper. The countess viewed the girl rather discontentedly, for she had not improved in appearance since she had last seen her. The small stature and the inexpressive features, not much noticed in early childhood, had developed into an ungraceful figure and a dull appearance. Her aunt turned from her impatiently; here was another blow to her plans. Unconsciously she thought of Nora's tall, slight figure and speaking countenance,

and with a sigh resumed her notes. Curt came in as they were sitting down to supper. He appeared heated and tired, but less excited than in the morning. Although he took his mother's hand and kissed it with emotion, her reception of him was cold, and during the meal the conversation was constrained. Curt often sought his mother's eye, and seemed to await an opportunity of speaking to her, which she pointedly avoided, retiring from the room as soon as supper was over and summoning the chaplain. The young man scowled, and all look of affection left his face. He stood motionless for a while as though contemplating following his mother, but apparently changing his mind, he bade Lily a short "Good-night," and went out.

This was a sad beginning of home life for poor Lily. She had anticipated so much pleasure in meeting her cousin, but he hardly noticed her. That something unpleasant had occurred between mother and son she was persuaded, and with a certain *esprit de corps* she espoused the side of her cousin.

Next morning a cab stopped at the —— Hotel, from which the chaplain descended. He sent his card to Director Karsten. The latter was busy writing, but he rose hastily as soon as the priest was announced, and going forward to meet him, whom he had not seen for twelve years, stretched out his hand, remarking, as he looked at his visitor, "Years have dealt lightly with you," for the peaceful life he led gave the priest a more youthful face than one might have had a right to expect. The two men shook hands cordially, and the

director asked, "Do you come as an ambassador? This unfortunate meeting has renewed a state of things which I hoped was ended. Please say to the countess that she cannot regret it more than I do. Perhaps I should have been more careful and foreseen that this might well be the result of the education which was selected for my child. She will always be apt to consider herself as belonging to that circle of society," he continued with some bitterness; "but I, for one, see an impassable barrier."

"I come as a mediator," said the chaplain. "Has Curt been to see you?"

"Yes, several times, as I was not in at his first visits. He renewed his proposal, and I repeated my answer. The young man was very earnest in his pleading, and I believe that both he and my daughter are equally sincere; it is painful to disapprove of such feelings. Nora inherits all her mother's capacity for loving; she will be very unhappy. My only child!"

Karsten, after walking up and down the room excitedly, stopped before the chaplain and said, "Pride is a peculiar thing, and your calling makes you say it must be conquered. I repeat, Nora is my only child, and God knows what sacrifices I am ready to make for her happiness. Do you believe that the countess would consider a proposal?"

"I am bearer of one," said the chaplain. "The countess has considered the difficulty of swimming against so strong a stream, and sends me to offer certain conditions to you and your daughter."

"Speak on," answered Karsten, taking a seat, and adding, as he laid down a recently written paper, "here is my proposition."

"The countess will no longer withhold her consent if the young couple have not changed their minds after two years' consideration, holding no communication, however, during the time, or at most merely in writing," repeated the priest in the tones of a studied message. "During this period all that has passed must remain a secret. If they observe these conditions faithfully the countess will be true to her promise to welcome Miss Nora as a daughter; otherwise she will hold herself free to act as she pleases."

The director listened attentively while he stroked his long beard thoughtfully. When the chaplain ceased speaking, he said, "The countess counts on the changes which time often brings; perhaps I am actuated by the same motives when I accept her conditions. So be it. The young people must submit to the trial, which is not too severe in so serious a choice. Be kind enough to tell the countess that I fully appreciate her hopes, and heartily join in them." Suddenly he sprang from his seat, and walking up and down, said, "But I shall defend my child. I shall remove an obstacle which the countess did not mention. I am fully aware of the fortune which Count Degenthal would lose in the event of not marrying his cousin. This loss can be more than compensated for by the circus-director's daughter. Say to the countess that my daughter is in no need of hunting after a count. There, sir, is the amount of her

dower on the day of her marriage." He calmly showed the recently written sheet of paper which had lain on his desk.

The chaplain could not conceal his astonishment at the sum, and Karsten, smiling at the expression on his face, added bitterly :

"The much-despised business has not been so bad. It more than quadrupled the small portion of my first wife ; the half of it is Nora's fortune. The countess can satisfy herself of the trustworthiness of my assertions by applying to my bankers, and I hold myself in readiness to give any desired information. Tell her also, for I fully appreciate the fact, that there are chasms which cannot be spanned by golden bridges ; tell her my daughter can claim a different name to that which I bear. She can take her grandfather's, one of the proudest in France. I possess all the necessary documents to establish this. Nora can separate herself entirely from me," he added in a trembling voice. "Through love her mother left her parents. Nora shall have the same privilege."

The expression which passed over Karsten's face in uttering these last words brought back the man and scenes of former years so forcibly, that the chaplain seized his hands and said, "This noble act is worthy of you ; Curt and his mother will know how to appreciate it."

"What I do is hardly enough," replied Karsten, shaking his head, "considering the high social position of the count's family. The conventionalities of life must

be respected, even though the individual may suffer. Better had I followed my own judgment and been spared this vexatious entanglement."

"Possibly to have fallen into a worse," added the chaplain earnestly. "Her mother's anxiety was not only for the temporal, but the eternal welfare of her child."

"Yes, that is the pious view to take of it," said the director lightly; "but we worldly people judge by the present. Had I had my way, Nora would now be world-renowned in my adopted profession; as it is, I have to be humbled, and yet give up my daughter. Such is life."

The chaplain did not answer this sad reproach, seeing that Karsten's life had completely changed his ideas of the value of birth; but after a pause he asked kindly, "Mr. Karsten, do you never think of retiring from this wearing career and enjoying your large and well-earned fortune?"

Karsten smiled and answered, "Fortune! Much is needed, my friend. Who knows for how many I may have to provide? I am not meant to fold my hands. Well, it suits me, you see. Now let us consider the happiness of the young people. I have already lost too much time, and must leave here to-day."

The chaplain rose, and the director parted from him in the courtly manner which became him so well. Notwithstanding the unselfish and manly way in which Karsten had behaved throughout the whole affair, the chaplain could not free himself from the disagreeable

impression that the man was slowly sinking into depths which might at any moment engulf him. "No man," he soliloquized, "can withdraw from the rank in which he is born with impunity. May God grant the poor child a safe haven in coming storms!"

Curt had an uneasy night. The evening's meeting with his mother had awakened in him a spirit of resistance. After his interview with Karsten he had determined to leave nothing undone to prove to his mother that his love for Nora was no fleeting passion or light fancy; but if she would not be convinced, then he was ready to sacrifice everything rather than his love. These trying thoughts were at length followed by a deep sleep. In youth sorrow provokes sleep, while in age even joy banishes it.

The first news which greeted him on his awakening was that his mother and cousin had left. He sought an explanation from the chaplain, and each moment that he waited only strengthened his resolutions. At length the latter appeared and communicated the conditions of his mother's consent. When we have been spending all our exertions, mental and physical, to attain an object or to overcome an obstacle, it is a shock to find that it has all been accomplished independently of us. Curt felt overpowered; that for which he had in thought strained every nerve was presented to him as a toy to appease an exacting child who was expected to become weary of it. He dared not refuse the conditions, for this would evince a suspicion of his own constancy. He could not, however, affect gratitude, notwithstand-

ing the encouraging words of his friend. His self-esteem was wounded. When he went that evening to exchange pledges of loyalty with Nora there were many things which did not add to his comfort. In the hall he found some rather peculiar-looking persons belonging to the troupe. One in particular struck him unpleasantly as he heard him expressing to the director his "pleasure at being taken into the company." The penetrating eyes of this individual, which left no doubt of his Jewish extraction, were fastened inquiringly on the young count, as though he suspected him of looking for a position, and only fell when the warm welcome extended by the director to the newcomer put his suspicions at rest.

Karsten led him into the drawing-room, saying in a somewhat apologetic tone, "Unfortunately unforeseen business necessitates this. Even here I am obliged to be busy, and am hunted to death with inquiries."

Curt bowed low, and for the first time felt disagreeably the position in life from which he was taking Nora. The thought made him decide that during the two years of their separation she must be removed from its influence.

At this moment the sweet face of his enchantress appeared behind her father, and put to flight all these dark thoughts, leaving uppermost the one that she was "his."

Nora saw only joy in the change things had taken, and could hardly believe her father when he explained it to her. Was it the effect of her own letter, expressing her determined constancy, or was it, as she loved to

believe, that the heart of the countess was touched? The conditions seemed nothing to her; she only saw the happy result of their fulfilment, and could not understand why her father and Madame Sybille were not more enthusiastic. What was a two years' trial? With smiling mouth and glowing eyes she said twenty were nothing when a lifetime stood behind them. The happy inexperience and the loyalty of true love banished time in her heart.

Curt remained in the city three days—days which he determined to steal from his term of banishment and silence. In order to ensure the latter, he determined to remain as short a time as possible in Heidelberg, alleging the necessity of attending to his affairs and remaining near his mother. His natural tenderness longed to regain his old place in her heart and to win her love for Nora. What did he care what motives the world ascribed to his change of plans, so long as he was sure of his happiness?

As far as Nora was concerned, his only thought was how she could be saved from the surroundings of her father's business; but her filial love resented the thought of separating her from him. The director himself proposed the desired means. He had long wished for a home, and the desire was stronger now that his wife looked forward to new duties. He proposed to purchase a villa, where Nora might pass the period of their trial in the society of her step-mother, or with a suitable companion when the latter preferred to accompany her husband on his business tours.

CHAPTER XI.

SOME time after the occurrences already related the countess removed to the city. It was the first time since her widowhood that she had left the seclusion of her country estates, and the necessity of introducing her young niece into society, as well as her son's determination to fit himself for a diplomatic career, was the excuse she gave for the move. The *world*, as men call the little circle in which they live, speculated on the change according to its different points of view.

This *world* considered the niece rather young to be introduced into society, and wondered seriously that Curt should adopt a diplomatic career in preference to the lighter duties of heir to a large property. Some saw a clever stroke on the part of the mother to avoid relinquishing the authority she enjoyed so thoroughly, while others thought that they discovered on the part of the son an attempt to escape from his mother's influence. The *world*, as is usually the case, was both right and wrong. Under ordinary circumstances the countess would have been the first to pronounce seventeen entirely too young for Lily to abandon her studies, and would have kept her at least another year in seclusion. Still less would she have desired to see her son give up his position as landed proprietor to enter politics. She, however, saw herself obliged to abandon her first prin-

ciples, for she was determined not to allow her son's infatuation to continue, notwithstanding the magnificent settlements promised by the director. She vowed to leave nothing undone to prevent the marriage of her son with the circus director's daughter.

The countess realized that the quiet of a country life was not conducive to wean Curt's thoughts from his love, particularly as Lily was so little calculated to interest him. Abandoning all ideas in that direction, therefore, she put her hopes in the influence of an active and ambitious life and intercourse with society. Attributing Curt's fancy to his little knowledge of the world, she promised herself that mingling with it would be his cure; hence she proposed a diplomatic career as necessitating a residence in cities; and in order to keep him under her immediate supervision, she decided to introduce Lily.

To Curt it was not disagreeable to enter a career which does not require too close attention, while it gives a young man of means such good opportunities to extend his circle of acquaintance. The one subject which separated him from sympathy with his mother made it irksome to be alone with her, and the narrowness of a small neighborhood was tiresome. All things contributed to make him wish to begin a life of more intellectual activity.

The countess's *salon* soon held an enviable place in society. The glamour of the apparent coming union of the heir to an ancient name with a young heiress was not wanting to increase the attraction, for it was currently believed that nothing would please the countess

more than the marriage of Curt and Lily. This was all settled by the fertile brains of enterprising gossips, for neither of the young people gave the slightest excuse for linking their names together. Curt was perfectly indifferent to his young cousin, and was as retiring in his mother's drawing-room as good manners would allow in the host. He seemed completely wrapped up in his studies, and the female world had so little interest for him, that not one of the belles could boast of an unusual attention.

The countess was no doubt disappointed by the want of success in her well-laid plans. At the close of the carnival she gave a ball. Curt assisted his mother in doing the honors with a grace which was natural to him, but with that indifference that comes from a want of natural love of society in itself and a pre-engaged mind.

"What a charming fellow your son is!" said an old gentleman, who was held as an authority in the best circles, to the countess—"well-bred, handsome, and clever—quite the pride of any mother's heart."

The countess gracefully acknowledged the tribute, while at the same time a shadow passed over her countenance, giving the impression that there still remained something to desire.

The look was noticed by the old cavalier, who never lost an opportunity to learn something of other people's secrets. "I have admired him," he continued, "and have seldom seen a young man of such strict principles. Indeed, he has entered so little into the pleasures of our city, that it makes one a little anxious for the future.

You know, dear lady, we must all sow our wild oats, sooner or later."

"If that be so absolutely necessary, my son will certainly pay the penalty," she answered, with so much bitterness that one might be tempted to believe that she had had a sad experience.

The old gentleman's curiosity was still more excited. What *could* she have to complain of in her son, of whom even the most malignant had nothing evil to say? Could it be that he was not quite submissive to mamma with regard to little gold-bird yonder? He looked at Curt, and thought that he was indeed very cold-blooded to his cousin, who was just then trying to converse with him. After a few moments' pause the attack was renewed. "We shall soon have to part with your son, according to a secret confided to me. Our young ladies will be inconsolable when he leaves without allowing one to claim his attention."

"He is yet very young," answered the hostess. "But since you are in the secret, pray tell me where is it proposed to send my son."

"Diplomatic secrets," murmured his Excellency. "Furthermore, I should hate to destroy the pleasure of the evening for my fair hostess; mammas do not love long partings."

"Pray, tell me, if you know. They will not send him northward?" persisted the countess with visible emotion.

"Quite in the opposite direction, dear lady; to no less a personage than his Turkish Majesty is he to be

our representative. But every one knows how woman's influence may alter decisions," he added in a whisper. "Our attachés are not of such importance that the State depends upon them."

"There is no good reason why Curt should not go to Turkey," said his mother. "We mothers cannot expect to tie our sons to our apron-strings. Baron X——, the ambassador to Turkey, is an old friend of our family. But, your Excellency, you are a dangerous man; you know all the State secrets," she added, with a sigh of relief.

The old diplomat smiled, for he was one of those who liked to have it thought that they still wield some influence in spite of advancing years. As the countess rose to greet a new arrival he looked after her and muttered, "A true Semiramis! I would give a good deal to know why she wants to send her oldest son away. It would seem as if he were growing up too quickly. Oh, woman, woman! I shall see what there is to the timid little maid."

By the "timid little maid" he meant Lily, who stood near, looking rosy, embarrassed, and dull. She was a favorite with elderly men, while to the younger ones she was tiresome. Her reputed fortune and the advice of prudent mothers brought her some admirers, however, who remained indifferent by her side, and for whom she had blushes and smiles alike. Close observers might have remarked that her eyes generally followed her handsome cousin, who seemed entirely unconscious of the attention. Generally he avoided her, and on this

occasion abruptly left her in order to greet his friend Dahnow, who had taken a trip to the city and received a most pressing invitation from the countess to the ball.

"You are not very civil to your cousin," said our old friend, as he found himself dragged unceremoniously into an adjoining room. "You were dancing with her."

"Oh, relatives need not be ceremonious, and that grand chain is very tiresome. Why did you delay coming until the very end of the carnival?"

"I merely wanted a little trip before beginning the task of preparing for my examination. Your little cousin may yet be quite pretty when she has grown; she has a pretty expression about the mouth."

"Has she? It is possible; but I do not admire her style of beauty."

"But she admires you. Her look when you left her so abruptly quite cut me to the heart."

"They have filled her head with stupid ideas that it is hard for her now to rid herself of. Dahnow, I bear about me a talisman. I did not write to you about it; but look here." With these words Curt drew forth a medallion bearing the loveliest female head.

"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed Dahnow. "You were so uncommunicative and left so precipitately, I thought that affair was all over. You think, then, that you will succeed?"

"I have succeeded. There are, of course, some conditions. My mother insists on a two years' secret engagement. Have they got wind of it on the Rhine?"

"Not much; they thought your mother had pru-

dently recalled you home, and as the director and his family left soon after, the affair was quickly forgotten. You know student love is proverbially fleeting."

"*Nous verrons*," said Curt, stroking his beard and gazing on the medallion.

Dahnnow looked serious. "Do you know—" he began, and stopped suddenly. Then in an altered tone he asked, "Where is she?"

"At a villa near D——, which her father has recently bought," answered Curt. "She will reside there for two years. I could not endure to have her with the circus, and made this request."

"What are your plans in the mean time? I know that you have devoted yourself to diplomacy. Do you remain here for the present?"

"My preparatory studies are completed; I shall soon be assigned to some embassy, and am in daily expectation of some news."

"Indeed," said Dahnnow rather relieved. "See, my friend, one of the servants seems waiting for you; you had better inquire what he wants."

"Oh," said Degenthal, looking at the waiter who stood in the doorway, "it is supper-time. Old fellow, I shall see that a cosey place is reserved for you. As host I must devote myself to the stars of the first magnitude, but I shall join you as soon as possible. Take my little cousin in, as you are a stranger to the others."

"Do not trouble yourself about me; I shall take care of myself," muttered Dahnnow, and it was very apparent that he knew how to do so, for a few minutes later he

was by the side of the belle of the season in the midst of the brightest group in the room, where his natural wit added much to the general enjoyment.

"Oh, Count Degenthal!" cried out the beauty, casting her brilliant eyes on Curt—something, by the way, she had done all winter, hoping to bring him to her chariot wheels—"Count Degenthal, tell us what brings your North German friend to our city just now when we are about to forswear all vanity and cover our heads with ashes."

"Simply because I am a heretic, gentle lady, who knows nothing of pious practices. I am now very penitent, for I have discovered what I have lost. Will you, in your charity, give me a dance?"

"Flatterer!" said Degenthal smiling. "Countess Hedwig, punish him with several dances. I know he believes in the Turkish doctrine that prefers to look at dancing rather than work at it."

"I know what has brought Baron Dahnow," said one of the young men. "His town sends us one of the most renowned directors of the art where there is more jumping than dancing. Do you know, ladies and gentlemen, that the renowned Karsten and his circus are coming to help us to endure Lent?"

All eyes being turned on Dahnow, no one noticed how Degenthal shuddered.

"Baron Dahnow, you are actually blushing," cried out the Countess Hedwig. "So these four footed beauties are your guiding star?"

Dahnow laughed a forced laugh and said, "Friend

Curt, you seem not to have much of an opinion of your city since you are at a loss to account for one's visiting it. Karsten was not with us this winter. He went farther north."

"So you follow him here," called out one of the company. "*Chi lo sa!* Perhaps the four-footed beauties are not the attraction. You know they say Karsten has a pretty daughter. Last winter she was all the rage on the Rhine. I hope she will appear."

"Nora Karsten does not perform," said Lily in her mild voice. "She has never appeared in public, and never will."

Every one looked astonished at the little speaker.

"What do you know of her?" asked the Countess Hedwig.

"I know her well and love her," answered Lily. "I was with her nearly a year at the convent where she was educated. She was the prettiest and sweetest of all the scholars, and particularly good to the newcomers."

"That is rather a novelty—a circus-rider coming from a convent."

"She is not a circus-rider," persisted Lily. "Her mother would not allow her to be one, and so her father, who is very rich, placed her in the convent. We did not know that her father was a circus director. I found it out later from our chaplain, who knew her."

"What is she like, and where does she live?" inquired the Countess Hedwig.

"She is prettier than any one I know," replied Lily

vindictively. "I do not know where she lives, but I suppose she is with her father. One thing I do know, she could never do anything wrong; she is too good and too well bred."

The little defender was flushed with zeal. For the first time a certain pair of eyes rested on her with interest. Degenthal seemed to hang on every word she uttered. For the first time he noticed the "pretty expression around her mouth" of which Dahnow had spoken. A little while later he stood behind her chair asking, "Cousin, are you engaged for the cotillion? May I have the pleasure?" Lily blushed, her delighted surprise allowing her merely to bow; this surpassed her wildest dreams.

As the famous "Sir Roger de Coverley" was closing the evening's festivities, the countess doubted her own sight when she saw her son and niece *vis-à-vis*. There are moments when the dullest eye will sparkle, and now Lily's seemed two seas of light as Curt gave her his undivided attention. The countess had not heard the school reminiscences which had wrought the change, and could not believe her senses. Had she heretofore been blind? Had the intimacy of domestic life prevented her seeing how things had been maturing? Had she been too hasty in seeking diversion for his thoughts? What was she to do now? These were questions which the countess asked herself, and in her uncertainty she sought the old diplomat, and with one of her most gracious smiles asked, "May I take advantage of my sex's privilege to be fickle?"

"It would only make you appear more like the rest of us poor mortals," answered the old gallant.

"Constantinople is so far ; the climate makes me uneasy. Can you not, you all-powerful man, use your influence and get certain appointments changed ?"

"I am always at the service of the ladies," replied his Excellency, with one of his most profound bows. "Baron X—— can choose another of our young gentlemen."

At times the same train of thought seems to run through various minds. At the moment that the diplomat uttered the last words Curt was lost in contending considerations. As long as Lily continued the allusions to her school life she interested him, but now the fact of Karsten's expected arrival troubled him, and for the first time his mother's worldly wisdom received his blessing. His thoughts also flew to his mother's old friend, who, he hoped, could hasten his departure, for he shrank from meeting the director under existing circumstances, and he determined to lose no time in making inquiries concerning the probable day of the arrival of the circus.

Early on the morning after the ball he rode out to the place where circuses were always held, and found laborers at work preparing for the expected exhibition. There he met the dark-visaged man whose acquaintance he had made in the rooms of the director in Brussels. He seemed to be a kind of manager, and welcomed the young man, whom he immediately recognized, and whose connection with his chief caused him so much curiosity.

Curt was very unfavorably impressed with this man, who answered his inquiries by stating that Director Karsten had come on with the advance guard of the troupe, and was then lying quite ill at the most prominent hotel, where he proposed to accompany Curt, and was evidently much displeased with the coolness with which his services were declined.

As Curt remounted his horse contending emotions warred in his bosom. Not to go see the man to whom he hoped to be so nearly related, and whose hospitality he had so often enjoyed, he must acknowledge would be despicable. Lily's talk of Nora had awakened in his heart a longing to see her, or at least to hear something of her. He determined to go immediately to the hotel, but did not notice that he was followed by the dark, Jewish-appearing individual.

Arrived at his destination, he inquired for Karsten, and while waiting to be announced entered a room at the window of which he remarked a woman standing. Believing it to be Madame Karsten, he advanced. The lady turned around, and with the exclamation, "Curt!" two loving arms encircled him, and a loving head was pressed to his heart.

In his response of "Nora! Nora! you here!" there sounded more astonishment and annoyance than pleasure or affection.

His kiss must, indeed, have been cold, for she raised her head and said, with bewilderment, "Are you not glad to see me? This is no breach of our promise, for

it is the result of accident ; but I bless the Fates with all my heart."

" Oh, why are you here ?" he asked excitedly. " You know how I hate to see you with the troupe, and how I implored you to remain at the villa."

The poor girl appeared paralyzed by this reproach, and sobbed, " My father was taken suddenly ill and telegraphed for us."

" Was it not sufficient for his wife to come ?" he asked, with increasing excitement.

" Oh, Curt, you surely do not know what you are saying," she replied in broken-hearted tones. " Is it so disagreeable to you to see me ?"

" Not disagreeable," he answered, somewhat softened by the sad voice ; " but I must say that it is inexpressibly imprudent for you to come here to our home, where it would be so undesirable to have your name connected with such surroundings. You know how important my mother holds the conditions of our marriage ; how can I observe them when I know you to be so near ?"

" I will go away," she said gently.

" I myself am going on a long journey," replied Curt, " and so far it is fortunate that I have an opportunity of telling you that I shall be absent."

" You are going away ? Oh, Curt, do not be so coldly prudent," she said, as her blue eyes looked on him with astonishment.

" It is better ; it is necessary," he replied, with that determination which very young men love to exhibit to

the women they love, perhaps with an idea of impressing them with their superiority. "It is better that I should be far away during the two years of our trial. In a few days I am to go as attaché to our minister at Constantinople. It was a wise move of my mother's, as I see clearer and clearer every day."

Nora remained silent, as if striving to understand the meaning of his words ; then, once more throwing her arms around him, she cried, "Curt, you wish that we should be separated ; you wish to break our engagement ! It is not sufficient that we should be separated ; you also wish to put distance between us."

Curt drew her more closely to him, and pressing his lips to her forehead, said, "True love knows no distance."

"Yes, yes, it does know distance. As long as we breathe the same native air there is a subtle sympathy, and like customs unite us in a strong bond. Foreign lands and foreign people are so many obstacles between us. Curt, even the trees take on a different foliage in foreign lands, and the heart is clothed in different feelings. It was for this that your absence was planned."

"It was with my own free will," he said, stung by the implied doubt of his independence. "I weighed all the circumstances, and decided that the adopting of this career would be conducive to our future happiness. Have you such misgivings of your love ?"

"Of my love ? Oh, no ; for us women love is the motive of our life ; for men it is but an accident. Tell

your mother we shall carry out her conditions to the letter ; but, oh, do not go away !”

He bent over her, stroked back the dark hair from her temples, and kissed the trembling lids, swollen by the rising tears, saying, “ Do not be childish, my Nora. What are a few miles more or less ? Will the East rob your slave of memory ?”

She was about to reply, when Curt suddenly stood up. Following his eyes, she saw the dark man of the circus standing at the door with a satirical smile upon his lips. “ The director wishes to see Miss Nora immediately,” he said and disappeared.

Curt bit his lips and asked, “ Who is this forbidding-looking man with the unmistakable countenance of a spy ? Oh, I know how imprudent your coming was !”

“ That is Landolfo, my father’s principal. He is disagreeable to me because he assumes so much. My father considers his services invaluable, and under the circumstances we cannot always be too critical.”

“ *We !*” cried Curt impatiently. “ Oh, Nora, do not thus identify yourself with this horrid business.”

“ Curt,” she answered, “ you are determined to misunderstand everything to-day. You certainly know what I mean.” She did not approach him, but drew her pretty head up rather haughtily, saying, “ I must go to my father. Do you wish to see him ? He has been very ill, and it was only yesterday that he began to improve.”

“ It is better that I should not see him just now,” said Curt ; “ I do not feel in a proper mood, and besides I

might again meet that man, who is so antagonistic. I shall return in the course of the day. It is not our fault that accident has brought us together. I shall be able to give you further particulars with regard to my appointment. My compliments to your father."

He was about to embrace her, but with a quiet dignity she drew away, and her hand barely touched his as she left the room.

Curt left the hotel displeased with himself, with Nora, and with everything. The consciousness that a third person was now in their secret, together with the wounded feeling which Nora could not hide, added to his general annoyance. He would, perhaps, have felt even worse had he seen the burning tears that coursed down Nora's cheeks as she sat by her father's sick-bed, reviewing the scene just ended, or could he have seen the malicious light which shone in Landolfo's piercing eyes as he watched Curt descend the stairs.

"Ho, ho, pretty one," said Landolfo to the chambermaid, as he met her in the hall, "what is the name of the gentleman who has just called on the director?"

"There is his card," replied the maid; "madam said I was not to tell the young lady, but the gentleman was already in the sitting-room."

"Indeed!" hissed the man between his teeth. "This accounts for her ladyship's haughtiness. No one but a count is good enough to pay her court. It would seem that he has some trouble in reconciling his family to it."

That evening the countess found among her letters one addressed in an unknown hand. It read :

“A true friend warns you that your son had a rendezvous in one of the hotels this morning with Miss Karsten, daughter of the circus director. If you wish to nip the intrigue in the bud, it is high time to act. It is intended to entrap him and to make the affair public. This is the only means I have of putting you on your guard.”

This apparent ending to all her budding hopes was a terrible blow to the countess. She now believed that the change in her son's manner was merely a ruse to blind her. She was incensed against him, and still more so with those whose tool she believed him to be, and repeated to herself again and again that she could expect nothing better from that class of people.

Her inborn principles shrank from an anonymous correspondence, but in this case it must be intrigue for intrigue. She determined to save her son from this entanglement, cost what it might. Her resolution was no sooner taken than she dispatched a letter to her old friend, the diplomat, smiling as she thought that he would consider she had made rapid strides in the fickleness on which he had complimented her yesterday. She begged him to leave nothing undone to hasten her son's departure, as each hour's delay was of importance. She assigned no reason for the change in her ideas, but the worldly-wise old man was at no loss to penetrate the situation.

“Aha! the young fox is giving tongue,” communed his Excellency, as his tapered fingers gracefully took a pinch of snuff. “Who would have suspected him?

Still waters run deep, and his mamma is anxious to procure a change of air for him. She is a clever woman. Well, we shall see what there is to do."

He was well aware that there was much in his power. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour his carriage was ordered, and he drove to the door of his most influential friend. The countess should have nothing to complain of. The following morning Curt received peremptory orders to repair immediately to Pera, where he would find all necessary instructions. He was not surprised by the order, as he had been anticipating it, and merely looked on the apparent hurry as a circumstance natural to the profession. Had he not been so preoccupied he might have been a little hurt that his mother took his coming absence so indifferently. Lily was the only one who seemed disturbed.

There was no time for adieus or explanations. Before the close of the short winter day, and before he himself clearly realized it, Curt was seated in the express train, which took him each minute farther and farther from Nora.

CHAPTER XII.

CURT had now been a month in his new position ; its duties and surroundings gave him but little time to dwell on the past. Indeed, he rather enjoyed the varied interests of his public life after the domestic anxieties from which he had suffered. Even the sincerest love does not prevent men from growing weary of petty contradictions. Curt had left home dissatisfied with himself and with Nora ; there was nothing in their last meeting which gave him pleasure to remember.

A month passes quickly when we find ourselves in a whirlpool of new acquaintances, new surroundings, and new occupations ; but a month drags when we daily look for some desired news or long for some proof of love. This truth was forced upon Curt by the reception of a letter from Dalinow, which awakened him from the quiet of his life.

"Think what you wish of my interference," wrote his fat friend, "but I cannot understand how you reconcile it to yourself to make a young girl whose true love you have won unhappy. It is not for me to pass judgment on your hasty leaving, but I cannot help thinking that there was one to whom you owed an explanation. It is not necessary for me to name her, who has waited patiently for weeks for a word of explanation ; you ought to be able to understand the tender-

ness of her feelings better than I. That it was any comfort for her to hear through me that you had arrived safely at your destination and were well is very questionable. Perhaps it might have been more reassuring to think that sickness had prevented your inexcusable (pardon the word) conduct. It seems to me that your mother's conditions sit very lightly upon you ; this is not my idea of love's logic. To-morrow Karsten's wife and daughter will leave the city, where they have been detained by the sickness of the father. I shall also leave to-morrow. If you care to write to me, my address will be my old Mecklenburg home."

The letter certainly left nothing in the way of clearness to be desired. Curt did not require any examination of conscience ; his guilt stared him in the face. The repulse at their meeting, the frigid farewell, four weeks of silence, which had seemed to him so short, too—now all fell like a heavy weight upon his heart. The words, "Do not go away ! Do you wish to leave me ?" rang in his ears. His only answer had been a hasty departure without a word of explanation. What, he asked himself, was the reason for the great haste in leaving ? It seemed as though a veil had fallen from before his eyes, and he began to ask what influence had brought about this sudden appointment. He now remembered that it came on the very day of his meeting with his affianced ; he recalled his mother's look of relief and her cold farewell ; he thought of the astonishment with which his chief received him when he reported at the embassy. Now everything seemed clear to him.

Nora was right ; they determined to separate them, and they had succeeded. His mother had planned everything so cleverly and carried out her designs so effectively that his suspicions had been completely disarmed. His love and his self-esteem were equally wounded. Did she believe that she could conquer by underhand means the will she could not break ?

And Nora, Nora, whom he had so cruelly neglected, how she must have suffered ! His self-accusation even exaggerated those sufferings, for he knew nothing of the excuses which the true woman heart makes for the shortcomings of him whom she loves. Each day's absence now seemed like a month. Then came the thought—Dahnow had been her comforter all the time ; Dahnow had remained with her ; she must have complained to him, for his letter spoke of her “tenderness.” With jealous torture he dwelt on the word. What could have kept Dahnow so long in the city ? Could it be that he came there to meet the Karstens ? Curt recalled his embarrassment when joked with at the ball ; and now he was going to leave with them.

Curt asked himself bitterly if every one was conspiring against him, and he determined that, no matter what the whole world thought, he would not be conquered, provided Nora's heart remained his. Now, what was to be done ? He must give Nora some proof that all attempts to separate them would be useless.

Should he write ? Written words were so cold, and a letter may well fail to reach its destination when intrigue is at work. One spoken word would explain all,

a look would make reparation. He stamped his foot impatiently, thinking of the distance between them.

What was it that made him spring from his seat with an expression as if the battle were won? He was young and in love—two states which often matured the maddest resolutions. He was jealous of his love and of his vanity—a twofold fire which drives many to rash acts. Dahnow's letter gave place on his table to railroad guides and time-tables. In our age distance hardly exists, and love and war know no laws. Such was the logic to which Dahnow alluded.

Next morning Degenthal's servant took a note to the head of the embassy, announcing that the young count was ill and would be obliged to remain in bed, as the physician had prescribed absolute rest.

"There, there!" said the chief as he read the note; "we Germans are so stupid not to take precautions against the heat. This young man was particularly recommended to my care; I must see after him."

A few days later the spring sun shone on the windows of a small castle which looked out proudly between the surrounding villas in the suburb of a city in Central Germany. The guides lost no opportunity of telling strangers that for some time it had been and was occupied by a European celebrity, the circus director, Karsten, who had given a large sum for it and the surrounding park.

The sun's rays, which were daily developing the foliage of the stately trees, rested lovingly on the head of a young girl who had taken her seat on one of the bal-

conies of the castle, seeming like a sweet flower contributing its fresh beauty to the glorious spring. The bright sun, however, found no reflection in her blue eyes, which were cast down pensively and were surrounded by dark circles. There was deep sadness betrayed in her drooping figure and in the listless hands resting in her lap. The beauties of the surrounding landscape and the pure air which rose from the green valley had no power to distract her. To her everything seemed enveloped in a mist, and yet she thought of that spring, only a year gone by, when all seemed joy and hope. Was it only on the banks of the Rhine that the atmosphere she dreamed of was to be found, or did the light she looked for come from sympathetic glances rather than from the luminous god of day?

Nora was at a loss to understand herself. She did not like to acknowledge that she was hurt by Curt's silence, and yet why did she watch each post? She did not wish to nourish mistrust, yet doubt was knocking loudly at her heart. She wished to think of her love, and experienced a burning, restless longing. Two years' separation was the trial exacted, and she had accepted it without a murmur. What were two years compared to a lifetime of bliss? she had said. Yet hardly six months had elapsed since the edict had gone forth, and already it seemed as if time was hollowing out a chasm which yawned wider and wider each day, until now it threatened to become impassable. She had longed that some accident might interfere with the cruel edict. Her wish was granted, the meeting was

vouchsafed, but oh, what a sting of disappointment it left! Perhaps he was right, and that the going to a foreign country would prevent the possibility of such dangerous meetings; perhaps so, but, oh, she wished that he was not so coldly prudent.

The balmy spring breezes kissed her burning cheeks, and, like the touch of a loving hand, brushed back her waving hair, but now it seemed to her a mockery. Her tears and sobs increased, her head sank lower, and her very heart seemed ready to break.

Have her sobs deafened her to the sound of wheels stopping at the gate, or her tears blinded her to the figure hastening so rapidly from the carriage that the driver, looking at his generous fee, laughingly says, "I'll be hanged if he is not going to see his lady-love; they are always liberal"?

While the wise driver was making his sage remarks his passenger had taken a side path to the house. His tired looks, dishevelled hair, and disordered clothes told of a long night's travel, but his eye was clear and seemed in search of something, until it rested on the figure sitting above. With an exclamation of joy he sprang up the stairs to the balcony. "Nora! Nora!" he cried, as he clasped her in his arms. For a moment she could hardly believe her eyes; then she clung to him with all the earnestness born of loneliness and longing. The clouds had cleared away, and true spring hope and joy streamed into her heart.

Oh, love! love! The nun said thou wert not of value at God's throne, but the highest goal of all

earthly happiness, the sweetest of God's favors thou art.

Question and answer and explanation followed in quick succession. Surely she could not now accuse him of being *too prudent*. Three days and two nights had he travelled from the banks of the Bosphorus to spend at most six hours with her. How brightly her eyes shone ! How she scolded and praised in the same breath ! With what love she busied herself with a hundred womanly cares and attentions ! How she mocked at anxiety and courted hope !

While the lovers enjoyed the height and depth of their bliss, and all their misunderstandings vanished like dust, they gave no thought to him to whom they were indebted for the magic change. At length Degen-thal confessed his jealousy of Dahnow, and Nora laughed heartily. Oh, yes, she said, Baron Dahnow was very kind, but indeed she did not know where he had gone.

Neither of them suspected the heroic resolution which was the inspiration of the letter to Curt.

"Now we are quits," Dahnow said to himself as he posted his letter. "My conscience is at ease. If he does not return after reading this his love is not worth having, but I cannot bear the sight of those sad eyes. I interfered once before, I am interfering once again ; now it is for the last time."

However, after our good Mecklenburger had sent his letter and eased his conscience he was more thoughtful than ever. "I must try travelling," he said to himself. "I wonder why it is that the fewer connections one has

the freer one feels. I believe all this studying is making me cynical."

A short time after this self-communing, Baron Dahnow astonished his relatives by announcing to them that he was about to pursue his studies from human rather than printed books.

"What, Fatty," said one of his brothers to him, "you propose becoming a traveller, perhaps an African explorer?"

"No, no," he replied; "I prefer eating to being eaten. However, I shall go outside the range of railroads and hotels."

"You, the laziest soul on the face of the earth, propose to travel in the wilderness, and perchance climb the Himalayas?"

"No; I shall be borne up," said Dahnow laconically. "I shall always take my comfort."

Curt returned to his post. Baron X——, ambassador to his Turkish Majesty, was in his private room at Pera when his young attaché announced himself as recovered, and thanked his Excellency for his kind inquiries after his health.

"Are you quite recovered?" asked the ambassador, looking at him with a very peculiar expression.

"Oh, quite well, quite well, sir," replied the young man, with a beaming countenance.

"It seems to me that you look tired," continued the other very dryly. "Your servant is a strict watcher; it was impossible to see you, although I called so often. The doctor, too, was very discreet."

“ The doctor ! ” blurted out Curt.

His Excellency stood up, laid his hand on Curt's shoulder, and said sarcastically, “ You are yet but a poor diplomat, my dear ; your little plan is but a poorly spun web. Your features betray you. To which of the health resorts does the Trieste Railroad lead ? ”

Curt looked embarrassed, and after a few turns up and down the room his superior said to him kindly, “ Young man, do not sully your youth by unworthy connections.”

Curt looked up bravely and said, “ Your Excellency, it was a question of the happiness of one whom I respect as much as I love.”

Baron X—— looked at him earnestly and said, “ I believe you. It was reported to me that you were in very great danger of wrecking your life's happiness. Your countenance reassures me that it is nothing unworthy of you ; but be careful of what you consider life's happiness.”

CHAPTER XIII.

ALTHOUGH the skies were continually clouded and darkened with threatening rain, and although great misfortune hung over her, Nora was now happy, Curt's visit having chased away all forebodings and despondency. The threatened misfortune, however, left its marks on her father, whose manner and disposition had changed most perceptibly since his illness. There was a restlessness and irritability which had never been known in him. Even the joy at the birth of a son, which took place shortly after their return home, was of short duration, although the expectation of the event had given him such happy anticipation.

Nora had welcomed her little brother with a particular warmth, as she hoped that he would fill the place which future connections would force her to leave vacant. Her father's ill-humor she attributed to physical causes, and begged him to take more rest. He grew daily more and more restless, making frequent visits to the troupe, and on his return home was always accompanied by Landolfo, who had become unbearable to her, but with whom her father seemed to hold much secret consultation.

"Signor Landolfo," as he loved to call himself, and as he was announced in large letters on the bills, was evidently a telling card. The smooth face, the clear-

cut profile, and the flowing locks never failed to please the public. A close observer might shrink from the bold, cunning expression of the black eyes and the voluptuous upper lip, which the perfectly trimmed mustache failed to conceal. His high-sounding name had probably evolved from the more modest "Levi." One might borrow Schiller's poetic figure to describe him,

" One hardly knew whence he came,
When he left scarce remained a name."

He had tempted fortune in the drama, in poetry, in art. Once, completely out of funds, he joined an obscure circus company, where his striking appearance and cool assumption won him a certain popularity, and thus he came to the notice of Karsten. His equestrian talent was of the poorest, but Karsten soon recognized his quickness in seizing effect and producing good theatrical situations, and he was not the man to lose the ground he once won. With that adaptability which seems to be a Jewish inheritance, Landolfo knew how to humor his employer, so that he gradually became the chief manager of the business. The director, never liking the minutiae of his business, was only too glad to find one of quick perceptions and active habits to relieve him of them.

Of late several business entanglements had occurred. For many years Karsten was the acknowledged head of his particular calling. He had reaped rich returns, so that he could well afford to indulge his luxurious tastes. During the winter a rival appeared, who left nothing un-

done to surpass Karsten in the introduction of novelties which appealed to the exhibition-loving public.

Novelty always draws, and it was not long before Karsten began to notice the falling off of his audiences and the consequent diminution in the returns. Some of his best performers were tempted by large salaries to join the rival company, which wounded his professional pride, and he determined to spare no expense in procuring material to regain his lost ground. This naturally cost large sums, and, coming suddenly, was like the shock of an avalanche. He could not make any perceptible changes in his domestic expenses without injuring his credit, and he felt seriously crippled by the necessary payments on the castle, bought when he considered himself a very rich man.

All these anxieties weighed heavily upon him during the winter, and paved the way for his sickness. In addition to the trouble of competition in his own business was added the bad investments of the banker on whom he had always drawn for large sums.

On his present return to the villa he seemed tired, and in order to conceal his own uneasiness he sent Landolfo to the city to make inquiries into the affairs of this banker. The sight of his new-born boy seemed to afford him great happiness, but the presence of Nora cast a cloud over his brow, for he could not forget that the settlements he engaged to make on her marriage would be difficult to meet.

One evening he was in the drawing-room, surrounded by his family, when Landolfo entered. The director

rose hastily to meet him, whom he began to look on as his only friend. He gradually began to receive Landolfo as an equal, and on this particular evening his reception was even more cordial than ever. Madame Karsten and the manager were quite congenial. He belonged to her own class, and her pretty face pleased him. She treated him with marked amiability, as if to compensate for the coldness of Nora, to whom the man was unspeakably disagreeable, particularly since his meeting with Curt in the city.

The director begged him to take a seat and join the family circle, whereupon Nora rose and left the room, at which Landolfo frowned and viciously bit his lips. He was aware that she was the unacknowledged obstacle between him and his employer, and she had wounded his vanity.

Landolfo was not one to be indifferent to such beauty as Nora's, and his growing intimacy with the director filled him with the boldest aspirations. It occurred to him that his personal appearance and his usefulness would recommend his suit for the hand of his employer's daughter. No other son-in-law could be so useful in the management of the business as he.

He counted largely on his personal appearance, for in the circles in which he lived he had always been a flattered favorite. Nora's haughtiness he at first attributed to her seclusion from any contact with the troupe, and the discovery he made of her relation to Count Degenthal appeared to him the explanation of her antagonism to himself. Jealousy henceforth added

fire to his wounded vanity, and he determined to do what he could to remove all obstacles to his ambition.

In accordance with his character, the first step was the anonymous letter to the countess. In the beginning he looked upon the affair as an ordinary flirtation, but some chance words of the director and Nora's increased haughtiness increased his desire for revenge. She must be humbled, and the unfortunate developments in her father's business promised to place the means in his hands.

White with rage on seeing her about to leave the room, he opened the door for her to pass out, and his black eyes burned still more cruelly as she seemed entirely unconscious of him. His resolution was taken.

Karsten was annoyed at his daughter's action, and in order to palliate it he rose and said, "Come into my private room ; that is a better place to talk over business affairs, which are disagreeable to ladies."

"They seem to have no love for business men, on whom, however, so much of their happiness depends," he replied, so loud that the words must have reached Nora.

"I know some who appreciate them," simpered Madame Karsten from her sofa, where she reclined very gracefully. "Karsten, bring Signor Landolfo back, and do not keep him all the evening," she added, holding out her hand, which Landolfo kissed gallantly.

"Come, come !" called out the director impatiently, leading the way to his office, which was on a lower

floor. "Well, what news?" he asked before the door was closed.

No sooner was Landolfo alone with the director than his whole manner changed. He knew how necessary he was, and all pretence of deference disappeared as he coolly took a cigar from Karsten, and lighting it threw himself into a large chair, while his employer walked up and down the room uneasily.

"Here are some letters," he said, throwing a package on the table.

"But the banker?" asked Karsten excitedly.

"A severe loss at best. Two thirds at least must go, if not more."

"What a blow!" cried the director. "What a terrible loss! I don't see how I can meet it. The troupe is doing moderately well, but the expenses this winter have been enormous."

Landolfo silently puffed curls of smoke into the air.

"Two thirds lost—that means ruin!" muttered Karsten.

"One good season would make it up," replied Landolfo quietly.

"But can I dig a good season out of the ground?" cried the director angrily. "That fellow will ruin me; he will leave nothing untried. One man cannot vie with him; the business must be turned into a stock company. It is all a plan to rob me of my hard-earned reputation; but I shall not let them drive me from the field."

"What reports do you get from the company?" asked Landolfo quietly.

The director shrugged his shoulders as he answered, "The new clown is asking for higher wages; he cannot have them; the treasurer is out of funds. This new company has forestalled us in our tours through Central Germany. It is fine equestrianism to exhibit trained lions, is it not?"

"I would do still better, and introduce a better lion," suggested Landolfo with a malicious smile.

The director did not seem to hear. He was occupied with his letters, which had lain on the table. Suddenly an oath escaped him. "What now!" he exclaimed as he tore the paper he held in two. "Here is a pretty row among the women. Miss Elisa, my first rider, gives me notice."

"What does she say?" asked Landolfo unconcernedly.

"Read for yourself, I do not understand her nonsense."

Landolfo read the letter, and as he laid it down remarked, "I expected this."

"What did you expect? what is the matter?" asked the director.

"Professional grievances; Miss Nora did not return her visit, which our beauty will not brook. Every one is not so patient as I."

"Provoking!" growled the director; "that girl will ruin us with her foolish pride." He paced the room, and facing his companion said, "What shall we do, Landolfo?"

"Engage another ; Elisa is no longer a novelty."

"Engage another !" cried Karsten. "Where can we find another to equal her ? and the sums these creatures demand. Soon I shall not have a penny in my pocket. It makes my hair stand on end when I think of the situation ; it is ruin. I cannot bear it !"

"I know no one better prepared for it than you," calmly rejoined Landolfo, rising to shake off his cigar ashes.

"Than I !" exclaimed Karsten, trying in vain to look into Landolfo's averted face.

"What do you mean, Landolfo ? You are clever ; have you some plan ?"

"Miss Nora," he said, as he kept his face turned away, apparently occupied with his cigar—"Miss Nora is the best rider I know. Elisa does not compare with her. As for her beauty, it would attract the whole world. Let Miss Nora appear, and the battle is won."

Karsten shrank back, and after some minutes said, in a stifled voice, "My daughter has never ridden in public."

Landolfo said nothing.

"Her mother did not wish it," he said, as if communing with himself.

"Circumstances alter cases," suggested Landolfo.

"She would never consent," said Karsten.

"Every one speaks of Miss Nora's piety. She surely understands that it is a child's duty to save her father from ruin."

Cold perspiration stood out on Karsten's forehead as

he said, "She has other duties. She is engaged, and I have given my word to the count."

"Engaged, indeed!" continued Landolfo with a mocking smile. "Possibly to the young Austrian. Has it been officially announced?"

"It is to remain a secret for two years," explained the director.

"Such engagements!—engaged between ourselves—are understood," said Landolfo, with a meaning look and shrug. "I suppose that is the reason the young man went so hastily to the East. No doubt his mamma managed that."

"Where is he gone?" asked Karsten, for Nora had told him nothing of the appointment.

"As attaché to the ambassador to Turkey. Change of air was considered desirable for the young gentleman. Eastern lovers will teach him some lessons, my friend," said Landolfo, placing his hand familiarly on his employer's shoulder. "Let us understand each other; this engagement means love, not marriage."

"I consider the count a man of honor," said Karsten, as a red spot appeared on his cheek. Shrinking from the familiarity of his manager, he proudly turned away.

"I also," said Landolfo unabashed; "but he is young, very young. Be just, director. From his standpoint it would be madness, and madness is unstable. Such is life where such madness is sweet. The young couple have already had their misunderstandings."

"What do you know about them?" asked the director sternly.

“ A fortunate or unfortunate chance made me an unwilling witness to a little love scene. Miss Nora, in tears, became offended because the count reproached her for being with the troupe. She then begged him to give up the journey and the Turkish appointment. The count's answer was to leave that very evening without further leave-taking.”

“ I never heard of this,” said Karsten.

“ It would not be very pleasant for your daughter to repeat it to you. Miss Nora is a clever young lady, and as soon as she sees things clearly, she will know how to act. She will understand,” he added, in a drawling tone, “ that bankruptcy will not help matters, and that the daughter of a ruined circus director will be less acceptable than the daughter of a millionaire.”

Karsten was stupefied ; these words brought back the conversation he had had with the chaplain, his promised settlements, and now the consciousness that he could not make his promise good. It occurred to him that it would be unnatural for a daughter to refuse to save her father's honor when she could.

“ She will never do it !” he cried aloud.

“ Strange idea of filial duty !” said Landolfo frigidly. “ Our people are despised, but they understand this thing differently. Sleep over it. The morning will help you to decide. The house has not yet begun to burn over your head. We have three months' credit, and at the worst— I repeat, Miss Nora cannot be so unnatural as to refuse. Try her.”

He lighted a fresh cigar, and seemed waiting for Kar-

sten's reply. None came, and the burning spot on his cheek grew darker. Landolfo asked if he might retire, and received only a nod as answer, and the director was alone. His brain burned with the question, "Would it be in nature for a child to refuse to save her father from positive ruin?"

The count ! The count ! A silly love affair ended. She would return to her natural station. He had kept his promise to her mother with regard to her education ; but circumstances alter cases, as Landolfo had said. An idea seemed suddenly to strike him—he would sell out the entire business and retire ; but he put it aside. He could not allow his rival to feel that he had conquered. "That would not console her, and would give me but little help," he said. "She shall decide for herself," he muttered. "I will explain everything to her, and she must judge for herself. I will tell her nothing, I will tell her nothing," he added ; and still the words seemed to echo in his ear all night, "It is not natural that a child should refuse to assist and save her father !"

CHAPTER XIV.

NEXT morning Nora had her horse saddled in order to take her accustomed early ride. It was a lovely day, and her spirited steed seemed to prance in time to the beating of her heart. She was very happy, thinking of the surprise Curt had given her just a month ago. As she entered the court, which was separated from the park by a low wall, she saw her father standing at the window of his study. She nodded to him, and in order to give him pleasure, she encouraged her horse to rear that she might bring him again to his feet. She then put the beautiful animal through several tricks, and again saluting, she jumped the wall and cantered at full speed through the park. Her father looked with delight at the complete mastery she displayed over the fiery young animal, which she had chosen entirely unbroken. As she galloped by he could not refrain from admiring her. "He was right," Karsten said; "her wonderful beauty would attract the world. She would be the pearl of the ring. She is my own daughter."

The graceful girl little suspected the thoughts she evoked; her only object was to distract her dear father from the thoughts that had evidently been disturbing him lately. What could it be that had annoyed him? But she could not dwell on dark thoughts to-day, everything in the future looked so bright. The months

would pass quickly, and then she would be Curt's. How sweet it sounded ! She dwelt on every word he had uttered. How handsome he looked ! and—oh joy to a woman's heart—how tenderly devoted he was ! The remembrance drove the blood to her cheeks, and her hand quivered with each pulsation of her heart. Her thoughts flew far, far into the future, when she would be Curt's wife, and when for life she should bear his name, which would give her the place and position from which she was now shut out. Nora fully appreciated the advantage of station, and never hesitated to acknowledge it. All happiness has its chief spring in the heart, but there flow into it many small tributary streams, and the more there are of these, the more powerful is the torrent. Hours pass quickly when one dreams beneath the green trees of life and love. The sun was already high when Nora turned her horse's head homeward, and in order to shorten the way she determined to cross a brook which ran at the end of the park, and was crossed by a wooden bridge leading to the neighboring city. The banks were slippery ; her horse stumbled and would have fallen had there not been a steady hand on the bridle. " What a dangerous place !" she said, looking on the high banks, broken bridge, and deep stream.

Arrived at home, she found that the family had left the breakfast-room. Her step-mother and the baby were in the garden, so she descended to her father's room to wish him good-morning. She stopped at the door as she saw the director sitting with his head rest-

ing on his hand, the picture of despair. An open paper was beside him, and a telegram had fallen to the ground. With the quick instinct of love she connected all this with his changed manner and evident uneasiness. In an instant she was kneeling beside him, inquiring with the most affectionate words the cause of his trouble. She had always been devotedly fond of her father, and now a feeling of compunction was mixed with her love, for she was conscious that she had allowed the new love to take the first place. She was now very tender, and her father enjoyed the caresses of his child ; but in vain she begged him to tell her his trouble. At such times how fluently words flow from the lips, and how easy it is to promise any sacrifice that might lighten the burden ! The director raised his head and looked into the earnest eyes of his daughter. Was it his better self dictating his words, abrupt as they were, "Go, you belong to another. You no longer belong to your father, and cannot help him" ?

His daughter's eyes filled with tears, for she thought her father had some reason for the reproach, and all the more she tried to convince him of her love. She spoke fondly, and tried to discover the cause of his trouble in the telegram ; but the cipher was an enigma to her. She concluded that it must be a question of pecuniary anxiety, and begged him to tell her all ; that she had strength to bear it.

The telegraphic dispatch was from Landolfo, and announced increasing complications, which would leave even less than the percentage he mentioned yesterday.

Karsten saw clearly that this would ruin him, and he was in that state of mind when a man will grasp anything that promises relief.

He looked longingly at his daughter, and said, "If any one can help me, it is you."

"I!" she repeated, and at the same moment, remembering her mother's fortune, which was settled on her, she continued, "Father, do you allude to mother's portion? Oh, how can you doubt! Take everything belonging to me. What is mine is yours."

"That cannot help me," he said; "it is already gone."

She looked at him in a bewildered way. Had he really taken what rightfully belonged to her, and was that what was preying upon his conscience? But youth is generous, and Nora was more than usually so; she embraced him still more affectionately, and said, "Do not allow that to trouble you, darling father; use the money as you wish, only tell me how I can help you."

The director rose as if a weight had been removed, and said, "Now you cannot be his; it is better so."

Nora shrank back, gasping, "What do you mean, father? Do you refer to Curt? Do you mean that I cannot be his because I am poor? Oh, he has not given that a thought."

"I had intended," replied her father, "to have built a golden bridge which could lead you to those people for whom your heart longs so unwisely. I offered to sunder every tie which bound you to me in order that you might attain the happiness for which you longed,

and all against my better judgment ; but now the bridge is broken, the chasm has grown impassable. You are not only the circus-rider's daughter, but the daughter of a swindler and liar, according to their ideas."

" Father, of what are you thinking ? Your anxieties have over-excited you. Curt is just, and will judge with justice. Believe me, he loves me sufficiently to be indifferent to mere money."

" Mere money !" he repeated scornfully. " He cannot live without it ; that is certain. Beside the anger of his family and the social disturbance that a marriage with you will bring into his life, you wish to deprive him of the means of living ! A pretty love, that demands such sacrifices."

Nora rose to her feet, pressing her hand to her heart as if to still a sudden pain. The director also arose, and the more excited he grew the louder he screamed, " For what is your mad passion waiting ? Must he break the engagement and throw back the yoke you impose upon him ? Is it not enough for him to show you that he thinks no distance too great to separate you ? Is it not enough for you to see that his family look on you as a contamination ? Do you propose to use your father's ruin as an appeal for the granting of his favor ?"

Nora was not dismayed by this wild outburst. She lifted her head and said proudly, " It is only four weeks since Curt came here from the far East to reassure me of his unchangeable love. I believe in him."

" Indeed ; so he steals here to tell you of a love which

he is ashamed to acknowledge in public ! And this you call love ! This satisfies you ! This is the pride your exclusive education has taught you ! The lowest one of my troupe would not submit to such an insult. You listen merely to passion, and are indifferent to all else !”

“ Oh, father, father !” pleaded the wounded child, “ why are you so cruel ? Only tell me in what way I can be of use to you, and you will not find me indifferent. I would be the last to bind Curt if I thought it would make him unhappy. Tell me what I can do for you.”

The director walked up and down the room, and then said, “ I shall see what your words are worth.” Facing her, he thundered forth, “ Be your father’s daughter !”

Nora was speechless, and he continued :

“ Save him from ruin. By appearing in public you can do this. You have talent which will enchain the public. In a few months I will regain what I have lost.”

Nora looked at him blankly, as if listening to a foreign language.

“ You are mistress of the art,” he continued. “ You will be a new and fresh element which the world will admire. You have inherited my talent ; nature intended you for this career. Beauty and cleverness slept in your cradle. You will outshine all, as was prophesied in your childhood.”

Light seemed suddenly to dawn upon her. She covered her face with her hands and cried in a piercing voice, “ Never, never ; it cannot be !”

"I thought so," he said, turning away; "your idea of devotion does not include sacrifice."

"Father," she cried, "anything but that! I will work for you, suffer with you, abandon all for you—anything, everything but that."

"Everything but the one thing that will help," he said, rudely pushing her from him. "You have but idle words to offer. Go, bury yourself in your pride, and leave your father to his fate."

"But, father, I have other talents. I will seek a position, and all my earnings shall be yours."

"The few thalers your *position* will earn can do wonders!" he repeated with a sneer. "Spare me your fine words."

"Father, think of my mother."

"Your mother would never have failed me in my necessity. *She* hesitated at no sacrifice," he said, softening a little. "She abandoned all in order to go with me, notwithstanding my position, for which you have such contempt. Is her wish, expressed under entirely different circumstances, more to you than your father's disgrace?"

Nora sank to the ground in utter wretchedness, and yet all she could say was, "Sooner die! Sooner die!"

"Even if I should beg you?" asked her father wildly, laying his hand on her head. "Understand well, without this help I am ruined!"

"Rather die! Rather die!" were the only words

that came from the blanched lips of the suffering girl.

"Yes, rather die than humble your pride!" hissed Karsten in a choked, hoarse voice, as he turned and left the room.

CHAPTER XV.

NORA was unconscious of being alone. With her hands pressed to her face she remained lying on the floor, overwhelmed by the proposition she had just heard. She tried to go over what her father had said, but it was all a mystery. The only clear thought remaining was that she must be proof against all persuasion and argument. No power on earth must induce her to lower herself to such a degree.

She felt bitter at the thought that her father could make such a request. How could he think of it? Who could have given him such advice? Instinctively she thought of Landolfo. But she resolved not to lose time in thinking of this; her only care now must be how to help, how to overcome existing evils. Sorely she felt the want of counsel, and her woman's heart turned to the man she loved.

Surely this was a time when the urgency of the case would excuse their overstepping the imposed conditions. A resolution to write to him brought her some comfort. As she arose to go to her own room, she heard some one calling her. She slipped quietly through a side door, for she felt it impossible to meet strange eyes, and gained her room unseen.

She seated herself at her writing-desk, but the first words brought back the scene with her father so forc-

bly that she laid her pen aside. There was a knock at her door, and before she could reach it Landolfo entered, saying hastily, "Miss Nora, are you here? Where is your father?"

Nora received the intruder coldly, but he appeared not to notice it, and there was genuine agitation in his voice as he continued, "Where is your father? I know that he was with you, for he had matters of the first importance to discuss with you. Have you eased his mind? How did he appear when he left you?"

Nora looked at him as if in a dream, and merely shook her head.

"Oh, is that the way you sent your father away?" he asked scornfully. "Very filial, indeed! You do not seem to understand what a man may do on the brink of ruin. Once more, Miss Nora, where is the director?" he asked, stamping his foot impatiently as she continued to look at him vacantly.

Nora was deathly pale, and put her hand to her head as if to collect her thoughts. "I do not know. What do you mean?" she gasped. "He went into the garden after our conversation; let us seek him there."

"Into the garden! Did he go alone?" inquired Landolfo, in a harsh voice. "Madame Karsten imagined you were together, and did not like to disturb you. We did not suppose that a daughter would leave her father in his distress. You are to blame for the consequences," he added remorselessly.

"Leave her father alone!" The words struck her to the heart. She had thought only of her own misery.

"We must look for him immediately," she said, and, filled with horror, she stretched out her hand to Landolfo, saying, "Come with me to find him."

"You are entirely to blame for the consequences," reiterated the man. She did not hear him, for she was flying down the steps to the garden. Her step-mother stopped her to ask where her father had been all the morning. Nora had no time to stand talking. "He must be in the garden, or perhaps has gone to the city!" she called out, running so quickly that Landolfo could scarcely keep pace with her. Every minute was precious. She heard only the echo of the words, "You are to blame for the consequences!" Good God! She understood all now. Before her startled eyes stood the phantom evoked by the words he "could not bear ruin" spoken by her father. His last words were a repetition of her own, "Rather die! Rather die!" Oh, God, what more!

Like a hunted deer she ran along the winding paths, calling her father. Unconsciously she directed her steps to a spot which seemed burned into her brain. That slippery bank, the broken bridge, the tangled undergrowth, the deep stream.

"Do you really believe that your father went to the city?" asked Landolfo, coming by a short cut. "He believed me there."

"It is possible. A wooden bridge crosses the stream," replied Nora, as if to reassure herself. Suddenly it seemed as if leaden weights were on her feet; she stared at the stream paralyzed.

"Stand back, Miss Nora, this is no place for you," whispered Landolfo hoarsely as he seized her arm.

Nora tore herself from his grasp, and sinking on her knees, moaned aloud. Instinct had guided her aright ; her worst fears seemed realized. Partly sunken in the water, a figure lay stretched out, the head resting on the bank, as if the current had thrown it up. Had he slipped into the stream ? Had he become dizzy ? Had he done it intentionally, and had a kind Providence saved him ? Nora's first impulse was to raise the heavy figure, which gave no sign of consciousness. Landolfo was quickly by her side. "Be quiet and collected," he said, but his countenance belied his words. Cold sweat stood out on his forehead, and his teeth chattered audibly. With superhuman strength he pulled the gigantic body from the water, and laid the head carefully on Nora's knee. "He is not dead," he said, as he placed his hand over the heart of the unconscious man ; "he has only fainted ; loosen his necktie and rub him as hard as you can, while I go to the house for assistance. On his way to the city the bridge broke under him," Landolfo added decidedly, and kicking the rotten boards about, he left.

Nora did not hear or see what he did. Mechanically she did what she was told, haunted by the terrible thought, had she driven her father to this ? Had she in his hour of misfortune so repulsed him that he saw no other alternative ? "Through my fault, through my fault !" sounded in her ears. "Father, father, only live and I will do whatever you desire," she whis-

pered into the ears of the unconscious man, as though he must hear it and it would revive him.

Was it the change of position or the rubbing or the voice of his child which made a shiver pass over the body and a light breath move the compressed lips?

Nora tightened her hands and prayed, "Let him live, my God! Do not let him die through my fault. My whole life shall be spent in reparation for this moment." She pressed a small crucifix to her father's lips, and then to her own. "Nothing will be too much to save you, father." It seemed that complete resignation must purchase the life so dear to her.

Landolfo at length arrived with assistance. Madame Karsten understood from him that her husband had sprained his ankle in the woods, and a stretcher must be sent for him. To the men who came, the broken bridge was sufficient explanation.

They lifted the director carefully to the stretcher, Nora still holding his hand firmly. When she thought that she perceived some sign of returning consciousness she whispered again her willingness to obey him, so afraid was she that he might die without understanding her. Once his countenance seemed to give signs of comprehending; once she thought that she felt a slight pressure of the hand.

The accident was followed by hours of anxiety. In her excitement Madame Karsten was perfectly useless, while Nora's strength and tact were doubled. With perfect composure she left no care neglected. The doctor pronounced the director to be suffering from a

slight stroke of paralysis, aggravated by remaining so long in the water. For several days he hovered between life and death. Nora did not leave him day or night ; she neither spoke nor complained nor wept, but did everything as if his life depended upon it, and she seemed lost to every other consideration.

When the invalid was restored to full consciousness, he never alluded to the accident or to the circumstances preceding it. As memory returned he seemed distressed, and he sought Nora's eye furtively. Nora did not stop at half measures ; she wished to bring immediate rest to the tired brain. Kneeling at his bedside, and with her arms around him, she renewed the promises made while he was unconscious.

At first he eyed her incredulously, then with a questioning look, and finally, as a childish joy overspread his features, he embraced her and said, " Then it was not a dream ; it was not imagination ? You will help me ? Nora, Nora, you will save your father ! I knew that you would be a good child, and not abandon me in my necessity. Now your old father will not be obliged to part with his beautiful horses, that have been the pride and joy of his life, and without which he could not live. Nora, now we shall drive my rival out of the field ! It will be as it was when you were a little girl, and knew no greater joy than to have papa put you on a horse. Do you remember, Nora ? There came a chasm between us. They took my little daughter from me ; but, like your mother, you will do all I wish ? "

"All," sighed Nora ; but there rang untold agony in the single word.

"You would not have been happy with him, my child," he said, in the most pathetic voice, and stroking her bowed head. "You would have been miserable. I know the world. You would always have been looked upon as an impostor. He would have regretted marrying you, and have neglected you. That would have been a thousand times more bitter than this trial. Believe me, my child, I have saved you from much unhappiness."

The director, tired from the exertion of talking, leaned back on his pillow and believed what he said. There is nothing so persuasive as egotism.

Nora laid her poor, tired head on the pillow of her father, who held her hand fast, as if he feared that she might escape from him and change her mind.

"All !" she repeated, and the height and depth of her sacrifice rose up before her. Her love gone ; her position despised ; every joy lost, every hope buried. Heavily this knowledge fell upon her heart, so that it was hard to repress a cry of agony. Did the father see in his sleep what his child was suffering ? He threw himself from side to side and muttered, "She will not do it, Landolfo ; she will not do it."

"Yes, she will do it !" repeated Nora decidedly ; then she rose, freed her hand gently from his grasp, called a nurse, and for the first time in days and nights went to her own room. It did not seem the same ; everything in life was changed since she was here last.

On her desk lay the letter she had begun to Curt. The words looked like spectres. Now she must retract all that she had promised. It was all past—all past. With one hasty look she tore the page. "It must be, it must be!" she cried. Although her eyes were bloodshot from want of sleep and every limb ached, she sat down and wrote as if in a dream. What did she write? That she could never remember. It was a clear recital of the events of each day until she was forced to the final decision. It appeared to her as though she were writing of another; it did not seem possible that she could have borne what she described. She was brave until the end, but the last farewell, which was to open the impassable abyss, overcame her.

"Like one dying, I bid you farewell; like one dying, who does not ask if there be any hope. Curt, I could not accept your helping hand. Had you been near, perhaps you might have suggested some other way out of this trouble. But it is my duty! May the sacrifice I make obtain pardon for me if I am doing wrong. Adieu, Curt, adieu!"

The pen fell from her hand, her head sank as if in utter prostration, but her mind was agitated, and could find no rest from an ever-present longing. She saw herself once more the child weeping out her first sorrow in the arms of the brave, handsome boy, who placed her by the side of her dying mother, and she felt the feverish, trembling hands which confided her to her father. In her agony she cried aloud, "Mother, mother, was this your wish? Did you desire that I

should belong exclusively to my father? Oh, with my heart's blood have I given myself up to him. Now come and bless your child."

A drop of balm seemed to have fallen into her soul; a blessing seemed to hover over her, the blessing which sweetens each unselfish offering and sanctifies every act of self-sacrifice.

The letter lay before her. How should she address it? Her thoughts were perfectly bewildered. At Curt's visit they both promised never again to break his mother's conditions, and with this in view she did not get his address, and now she shrank from trusting her letter to strange hands. She concluded to send it to Curt's mother, murmuring to herself, "She cannot ask more of me."

CHAPTER XVI.

LANDOLFO had accomplished his ends even more quickly than he had imagined possible. He had greatly exaggerated the business troubles in his telegram to the director, with the express purpose of working on Nora's sympathies, and the tragic end of his management did not disturb his conscience so much that it could not be quieted by the anticipated advantage to the business.

He was honestly convinced that Nora's appearance in public was the only possible means of recovering the director's losses, but he also looked forward to furthering his own private ambition by it.

"In a few years," he thought, "I shall possess the treasure," and he already looked on himself as son-in-law of the far-famed circus director, and partner in a most successful business.

His first care was to leave nothing undone to prevent the possibility of Nora's changing her mind, and also to prepare for her a good reception from the public. To him all the intricacies of catering to the public were known.

While Nora sat by her father's sick-bed, telling little items concerning her began to appear in the most widely read papers; at one time it was her beauty and education that were written of, at another her love affair, which was treated in various manners, occasion-

ally coming so near the truth as to almost betray the names of those interested ; again the wildest conjecture was indulged in. The director's supposed loss of fortune was also hinted at ; obscure hints at possible change of circumstances, when Nora would appear as the deserted maiden, or again as the heroic daughter or the talented equestrienne. All these items of news were read, discussed, and more or less believed, for Karsten's celebrity made his affairs public property. The public gradually grew curious to see her who gave food for such general paper gossip, never suspecting that it all proceeded from the same pen.

With cunning foresight, Landolfo took pains that all these articles should reach the eye of the countess. She had long since received Nora's letter to her son. It made her very angry to find that her will had been set at defiance, and made this an excuse to absolve her in her own conscience from forwarding the letter. As the newspaper articles arrived, she naturally connected them with the letter in her possession, and did not know whether to be indignant or pleased that she whom her son had honored with his love could lower herself by becoming so publicly spoken of. That Nora was not to blame for all this publicity was no excuse in the eyes of the countess ; the fact of publicity was sufficient reason that her name should never again be coupled with that of her son ; it only strengthened her sense of the justice of withholding the letter for further developments. They were not slow in coming.

Time passed, and the director's recovery was more

rapid than could have been anticipated. All his thoughts and ambition seemed to centre in preparations for his daughter's appearance in public, on which he placed his hopes of regaining his lost fortune and reputation. Nora's appearance must be surrounded by all that was most brilliant and attractive before his hated rival could interfere. Hardly three weeks had passed since his accident, when flaming posters in large letters and gaudy colors announced, in the principal cities of Northern Germany, the return of the renowned Karsten circus, and the first appearance of the accomplished artist, Miss Nora Karsten.

Even the countess, prepared as she was, could not remain unmoved at the sight of one of these advertisements, which Landolfo took care to send her. Something like pity for the poor girl was awakened in her bosom. The graceful, noble figure and pure features, in which there was not a trace of frivolity, rose before her. She asked herself what could have driven Nora to such a course, but hastily concluded that whatever the provoking cause, the fact remained. A heavy weight seemed lifted off her ; at last she would obtain control over her son. She was too honorable to withhold the letter, but she took pains that it should not go alone, but accompanied by every item that had appeared, and by one of the large, offensive advertisements, as well as by the following letter :

“ MY POOR SON : I cannot keep you in ignorance of what the whole world already knows. It will awaken

you from a dream which your mother's wider knowledge of life made her long ago recognize as unworthy of you. Do not, my boy, blame yourself; it is the characteristic of noble souls to be easily deceived. I thank God that the awakening did not come too late for your life's happiness. Come to the arms of your mother. A mother's heart is always full of consolation for her children."

It was a trivial circumstance, that the countess had so arranged the package that her letter was the last of the enclosures that should meet his eye; but life is made up of trifles, and sometimes the lightest seem to bear the weightiest results. At the same moment that the package left the countess's hand, Nora stood in the dressing-room ready to appear. Her step-mother and a maid knelt before her, arranging the folds of the rich, dark skirts, which in their severe simplicity displayed her graceful figure. Several wax candles burned at the side of a long mirror, before which she stood, reflecting her rare beauty. Her only ornament was a wide gold chain, which bound her dark hair. She neither looked at the mirror nor at the hands which were busy about her. She stood as one in a dream, her cold hands clasped together; she had lived from day to day like one in a dream. Her father had saved her from all the minor details. Silently and quietly she had gone through the necessary practice, and the consequent exercise had kept her well.

But what was the secret hope that brought her daily

disappointment, and what was it that made her feel as if the last plank was gone from beneath her feet? Even at this last moment she hesitated, as if she thought something might happen to prevent the final step. Youth is rich in hope. She herself had bid Curt farewell, she herself had forbidden all attempt to rescue her; and yet, and yet, would nothing happen before it was too late? He had risked so much for one hour's happiness! Each day her heart had whispered, "To-day," and each evening it had to find some excuse.

From outside sounded the trumpets which announced the close of the scene preceding her appearance. The director came for her just as a servant handed her a letter. Nora shrank back; her father turned pale; but the next moment she let the letter fall from her hands indifferently: it was from the Superior of the convent, expressing her sympathy. But what is sympathy when the heart hungers for love?

"It is time," said the director hesitatingly. This last disappointment of an unacknowledged hope had so affected Nora that she was seized with a nervous chill.

Her father, fearing that all his hopes were blasted, said, "Is it not to be?"

"Yes, it is to be," answered Nora, aroused by the sound of his voice, which she had only once before heard so hoarse. "Yes, father, it is to be," and she followed him with a steady step.

Landolfo's plans promised to be successful in every particular. Every place in the circus was filled, so great was the general curiosity to see the new beauty.

The director had left nothing undone to increase the general effect. He seemed to wish to surround his daughter with a halo of glory. Grooms in gorgeous livery stood on all sides, and pages guarded the entrance to the ring.

Another burst of trumpets, a cry of welcome from the crowd, and with one spring the graceful equestrienne was in the middle of the dazzled crowd of admirers. Her horse, as if cast in bronze, stood perfectly immovable with his beautiful burden, who looked like a statue, so set was each feature. In the boxes the young men stood up and swayed with eagerness to catch sight of such marvellous grace and beauty.

Her fiery horse reared so erect that it seemed impossible for the rider to maintain her seat, but at the sound of the soft music he regained his feet, and went through evolution after evolution, until bravos rent the air. The oldest and most critical judges could find no words to express their admiration of such feats of equestrianism. The music grew quicker and quicker ; the horse, as if inspired by the general enthusiasm, with one wild neigh leaped the ribbons and disappeared. The eye of the rider had alone remained unmoved ; not a spark of pleasure nor of gratified pride had lighted it ; no answering look recognized the applause of the crowd ; she appeared conscious only of her horse.

Such cheering had not been heard for years, and it was with reason that Landolfo rubbed his hands over the success of his suggestion. Hundreds of voices called for the beautiful *débutante*, but her father in trem-

bling voice thanked the audience, and announced that the excitement of her first appearance was so great that it would be impossible for his daughter to come out to greet them.

Nora's success was secured ; but while her name was on every lip, and " the rising star " was toasted over many a sparkling glass, she lay pale and motionless upon her bed, too exhausted for even sorrow. There was but one visible to her mind's eye ; one in whose opinion the events of the evening would leave her forever branded ; one from whose circle she was now forever excluded. The nervous chill returned, and the swollen lids refused to close.

Mechanically she sought for the letter of her true friend, and read the following sympathetic words :

" My child, the Lord has indeed seen fit to lead you by strange paths. A pure intention sanctifies much, and sacrifice excuses all. This is my only explanation for your decision. Perhaps it is destined that you shall do more good in this dangerous career than in that which seemed to us safer. Child of my heart, whatever you do, you are dearer to me than ever. Let the tie of sincere love bind us. In thought I shall follow you, and pray God to protect and guide you."

Yes, friendship crossed the barrier which drove love back. Again and again Nora read the sentence, " A pure intention sanctifies much ; sacrifice excuses all." The last thought before sleep came to her relief was, " Will Curt think so, and not despise me ? Oh, he shall

see that I shall not sink even on this dangerous path ! His love shall save me from that."

While these occurrences were taking place, Curt was enjoying the pleasures of his surroundings. Since his heart had been set at ease and his resolution strengthened, he had recovered all his natural elasticity of spirit. He was young, and so confident of his own and Nora's love, that the time of their separation seemed nothing. When it was passed and she should be his, he would, he thought, retain his foreign appointment for some years, in order to save her from any possible annoyances at home. Then, improved by experience, they would return and together take up their domestic duties. The picture which he drew of his future was so simple and so sweet that he loved to dwell upon it. He was better calculated for a life of action, he considered, than for the narrow routine of a country life. Unconsciously his love for Nora had opened for him a freer life. For the present he determined to direct all his energies to studying the people of the East, and so far as possible to visit the places sacred to science and religion, which sometimes took him away from his post for weeks at a time.

It was on his return from one of these trips that his chief handed him a packet which had come during his absence. "A goodly volume," said the old gentleman, handing him the letter addressed in his mother's handwriting. "Well, well, the young rejoice in such arrivals, while the old fear them ; there is so little left of good for us in the world. Go, read your domestic chronicle."

As Curt went out he met a young colleague attached to the French Legation, who accompanied him to his apartment. With true French liveliness the latter talked on, so that he did not remark the preoccupation of Curt, who was not without anxiety at the sight of so voluminous a correspondence.

When he reached his rooms, Curt threw the package on the table, and the young Frenchman remarked with tact, "Oh, a letter from home. I should not have intruded on you, count. I beg you will satisfy your curiosity while I amuse myself in your conservatory. I am something of a botanist." He stepped into the enclosure which is such an agreeable feature of the houses in Pera, where flowering plants and miniature fountains make up for the close, dirty streets.

"My mother seems to be turning editor," replied Curt, in a gay voice. "Pray make yourself at home, dear count. Why, the package seems to contain only newspaper clippings. Take a cigar, while I look over them."

The count did not come in at once, for he was busy examining a floral specimen which was new to him. A noise in the room attracting him, he looked through the glass doors, and saw Curt bowed over the table, with his head sunken on his outstretched arms. The open letter lay at his feet, but his hand grasped one of the advertisements.

"In the name of God, count, what ails you?" exclaimed his friend, springing toward him.

A moan was Curt's only reply, and his head was

so buried in his hands that his face could not be seen.

"Count, count!" called the Frenchman kindly, "I beg of you to compose yourself. Have you received bad news? Are you sick? Shall I call the servant?"

Curt stretched out his hands, as if to prevent any one approaching, and said, "Only a headache; a little dizzy. Give me water."

His friend hastened out and dipped his handkerchief in the fountain, to place it on Curt's head. He was but a minute out of the room, but when he returned all the printed notices had disappeared.

"It was a terrible pain that seized me," explained Curt, as he still held his head between his hands, while the other laid the cool, damp cloth on his temples. "The fatigue of my trip must have been too much for me."

The polite Frenchman did not contradict, but he could not help thinking that his friend did not look at all tired on his return, and secretly concluded that his emotion must have been produced by some unpleasant news. However, it was evident that he wished it to remain a secret, and the Frenchman was far too discreet to pursue the subject, and merely said, "Your forehead burns. I would advise you to retire and send for the doctor. One cannot trifle with such attacks in this climate."

"I think I am better," said Curt wearily. "These climatic fevers make one delirious, do they not?"

"That depends," replied the Frenchman, smiling;

"but I trust it will not come to that, if you are prudent."

"Perhaps a fit of fever might do me good," said Curt, as if speaking to himself. "Sometimes a man is delirious most of his life. Forgive me, my dear fellow, I am such poor company. A doctor, you say? No, I think not; but keep visitors away. I hate visitors when I am sick."

"Just as you like, you unsociable German; but you must allow me to send for a doctor, and your edict against visitors must not include me, *mon ami*."

The Frenchman had chatted on, but he was not at all sure that he was understood, for Curt's eyes looked at him absently, and his thoughts were evidently far away. The Frenchman took up his hat in order to go for a doctor, but he had hardly reached the street when he heard his name called. He looked back, and saw Curt following him with tottering steps and holding a letter in his hand.

"Dear friend," he said hurriedly, "do me a favor. This letter must go by return mail. It is—it is to my cousin. By some mistake it was sent here. It must be returned."

Curt handed him the letter, with the word *returned* written in large letters.

His friend promised to see to it, and noticing Curt's excitement, begged permission to accompany him back, which the latter declined positively. He looked after the sick man anxiously, and seeing that the letter was directed to Curt in a female hand, he shook his head,

saying, " If a woman is not at the root of it, I am mistaken. The letter has not been opened. A man should never act when under excitement. Probably one of these days the count would give a good deal to have read this ; but these Germans are obstinate ; we must do as he says. Oh, woman, woman, there is no evil but you have a finger in it !" Saying this, the young man sighed, as if he had some experience.

Nora waited longingly for an answer to her letter, which was for weeks in the hands of the countess, for which cruelty the latter was destined to suffer much. Day by day she waited to hear from her son, but time went by and no news came. She wrote again and again, she wearied herself with conjectures. Perhaps she ought to have been more sympathetic, and prepared him for the disappointment. Had she undervalued the depth of his love ? She would not harbor the possibility of his standing by Nora and one day bringing her home as his wife. The suspense had become almost unbearable, when a letter came, not from her son, but from his chief. That gentleman informed the mother in the gentlest way of the illness of her son. He attributed the attack to over-fatigue in the journeys which Curt had made into the interior ; but the mother, in comparing the dates of her letter and the beginning of the illness, was at no loss to find the probable cause.

Her first impulse was to go to her son, but the writer expressed Curt's unwillingness to see her, and the doctor's opinion of the result of such a meeting deterred

her. She could judge from her own feelings what would be the consequences of their coming together.

The kind-hearted Frenchman, who had installed himself as Curt's nurse, sent weekly bulletins to the countess, but for a long time no chance of recovery appeared. The fever was followed by a mental apathy ; he suffered no pain, uttered no complaint, never mentioned any name, and seemed in constant dread of news from home.

The first physicians were called ; they all recommended change of air ; but the bodily weakness of the patient made a journey impossible. It seemed as if all mental and physical power was completely paralyzed.

"The climate did not agree with him," was the universal verdict of the crowds who came to offer their sympathy to his mother, and the countess could see in each countenance the question, What was the reason for exposing him to such danger? She accepted the expressed sympathy and implied reproach with equal coldness. No one would have known the tortures she suffered were it not for the bent figure and the suddenly silvered hair.

The summer was at its height when the news came that Curt could travel. The mother's heart beat with hope, and yet no letter came from her child. It was the French friend who always, in the most amiable and respectful words, wrote that her son was not strong enough to write ; that he had, however, decided to travel, hoping much from entire change of scene. He purposed going first to Greece, then to Sicily, and the winter would be passed in the South of France. "Al-

ways approaching his country and the heart of his mother," the Frenchman added with national tact. A list of cities where money could be sent to him was appended.

As the countess read this last letter, burning tears coursed down her cheeks. A sharp pain stung her to the heart as she thought that this was all the return she had for years of devotion, and unconsciously the words of the nun of Brussels came to her, "You may lose a son instead of gaining a daughter."

She was not a woman, however, to allow herself to be mastered by such feelings. She had acted according to her principles, and looked on the result as a consequence which must be borne. "He will get over it," she said to herself. "His good constitution will conquer," she said to others; and with these words she silenced all curiosity and sympathy.

She spoke to no one of her son's sickness, not even to her true friend, the chaplain, who was one of the family. In a few words she had mentioned to him Nora's appearing in public, and as, to his great sorrow, he knew only what was known from the newspapers, he could not account for the change of circumstances.

About this time the Superioress of the convent of Brussels wrote to the countess as follows :

"I have a word of explanation to give you with regard to her who might have come so near to you had not unfortunate circumstances so changed the dear child's career. She has made an unheard-of sacrifice to filial duty, and God will guide and protect her. Judge

her not. In the cause of truth I say this to you, and charge you to repeat it to your son. The knowledge that he did not bestow his love on an unworthy object will be some consolation to him in the trial he has suffered. God in His wisdom has decreed this, but the two young hearts have a bitter chalice to drink to the dregs."

The countess threw the letter angrily aside, saying, "The amiable Sybille has had her head turned by her infatuation for this girl. To bring him back to such thoughts now would be madness. It is really wonderful how seclusion from the world will make so sensible a woman as Sybille so unpractical. All romance!"

The countess herself was so practical that she took care to throw the letter into the fire—the only means that remained to her by which she could have regained the way to her son's heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

YEARS had passed, and brought their changes. Even Lily, with her rosy, chubby face was conscious of them, for she was now of age and mistress of her own fortune. Until now she had been under the care of her aunt, who never suspected that she would ever wish to leave it until she changed it for a protector for life. So far the heiress had turned a deaf ear to all suitors, much to the delight of her aunt, whose early hopes with regard to her son and niece were renewed by the late change in Nora's career. Her astonishment, therefore, was great when Lily announced her determination to place herself under the chaperonage of an aged relative, and to reside on her own property, which was situated near Vienna, at least a day's journey from the Degenthal possessions.

The countess sought in vain to discover what impelled Lily to this decision, but she did not offer any remonstrance, the latter being one of those quiet characters who never make a move until their right to do so is unquestionable, and then they rarely change their minds.

Since her cousin's sudden journey she had harbored a certain grudge against her aunt ; not that she exactly held her responsible for it, as she knew his desire to enter the diplomatic service, but she had an unaccountable suspicion that the countess had for some reason

wished Curt to leave home, and that he had not been happy. Lily was not remarkable for great or deep powers of thought, but with such superficial characters it is often found that they are very tenacious of a conclusion once reached. From early childhood she had looked on Curt as her own property, and when she unwillingly thought of his coldness and indifference toward her, the remembrance of the pleasure he took in her conversation that last evening consoled her, and she felt that she loved him enough to wait. She was one of those beings who are at their best in their own homes, and she felt instinctively that she and her cousin would be more to each other at her own fireside.

Notwithstanding her youth, Lily had a great deal of independence, and a well-regulated idea of the proprieties of her position. All that was beyond her capacity in the management of her business she left to wiser heads; her domestic affairs, her garden, her poultry, and her poor occupied her, and in this circle of duties all was well organized. If she was a trifle narrow, it was ascribed to her youth.

As was said before, young men did not find her very attractive, but their elders pronounced her a sensible girl who would make a sensible woman. Young girls did not understand her, but wise mammas looked on the quiet little blonde as the perfection of a daughter-in-law; a mistake into which many mothers fall in selecting these quiet, obstinate materials as being easily managed.

For once the undemonstrative little heiress was ex-

cited until the blood rose to the very roots of her hair. A letter from her aunt hinted at the possibility of a visit from Curt, who had at last turned his face homeward, and intended to stop to see his cousin, as her house lay on his way. Lily's pale blue eyes almost shone, and as the proposed visit would probably occur within a few days, the housekeeper was surprised at receiving so many instructions in regard to preparations which had never been considered necessary for other guests.

Notwithstanding the protestations of her chaperon, who was a lady of old-time prejudices, the pony chaise was sent to the railroad station each day, as "My Cousin Curt might arrive."

And how had time passed with "Cousin Curt" since the day on which the contents of that package sent by his mother had robbed him of all belief in love and truth, and dealt a death-blow to his life's happiness?

He never could clearly recall his own feelings when his eye fell on that terrible poster; he only remembered a bewildering storm which threatened his reason and seemed to precipitate him into a fathomless abyss. The depths of indignation, contempt, and wounded pride enveloped him. When he tried to doubt his senses, those flaming letters stood out in such fearful reality that when he found himself alone a piercing cry burst from his broken heart. No sooner had his friend left him than he looked with feverish impatience for his mother's letter, and when the facts were burned into his brain, his first care was to destroy all evidence of his mortification and disappointment, which would

bring upon him the derision of all his acquaintances. When he saw Nora's well-remembered handwriting, his first impulse was to destroy it ; then a second thought suggested that a sweeter revenge would be to return the letter to her unopened.

This was the last act of which he had any remembrance. On the doctor's arrival he found Curt lying on the floor entirely unconscious, and for weeks he remained delirious. As the fever abated a general paralysis set in, and in the long hours of helplessness he lived in the past. At times it all seemed a dreadful nightmare from which he must awaken, or a creation of his delirium which must disappear ; but no question passed his lips, and in the secret of his soul he tried to solve the problem. He had such a morbid dread of knowing the truth, that he shrank from receiving any home news. This condition so puzzled the physicians that they sought in every way to find out the cause of the trouble which was apparently preying on his mind, but all in vain.

A couple of months after he had been attacked his friend, in order to amuse him, got in the habit of bringing him some of those illustrated papers which give such good pictures of all that is of passing interest, from the doings of crowned heads to the feats of crowned oxen. They occasionally provoked a faint smile from the invalid, until one number came that was full of the wonderful equestrienne who had lately appeared. His friend was delighted to see Curt's curiosity so aroused as to make him stretch out his hand for the paper. He

looked for some minutes at the illustration, then he suddenly turned away his face, his head sank back, and the wild delirium returned to his eye.

“So weary,” groaned Curt ; and that night he had a relapse from which it was more difficult to recover than from the original sickness, for it seemed even after his youth and good constitution had seconded the cleverest medical care, a lethargy set in from which it was impossible to rouse him. No doubt now remained. All was but too true ; she for whom he was willing to sacrifice all had trampled his feelings in the dust.

As a last resource, the physicians insisted on change of air and scene. “Anywhere, anywhere but home,” Curt answered to their advice. That air, it seemed to him, would suffocate him. He did not hold his mother responsible for his unhappiness, but we are apt to turn from the hand which was the instrument of letting us know of our ill-luck. He could not but fancy that she would rejoice. She had prophesied how it would be ; and we are not drawn to the foreseers of ill when their words are verified. He wandered from place to place. A stronger character would perhaps have sought distraction in the struggle and strife of life ; but his love gone, all was void to him. Necessity of action is the only saving to such natures in such trials, and Curt was not forced to this, so a morbid lethargy completely mastered him.

At the end of three years he complied with his mother's repeated requests to come home. The express train from Paris to Vienna makes as few and short stops

as possible. One evening, at one of the intervening stations, a young man with the unruffled manner of a habitual traveller stepped up to the guard of this train and asked him for a first-class coupé. The obsequious official opened a door, and on the traveller begging for a compartment to himself, he shrugged his shoulders, merely saying, "All the others are even fuller;" the young man entered and found two female passengers already installed. The elder, judging from her dress, was a maid; she was fast asleep, and snoring most comfortably. The other, owing to the waning daylight and her sitting in the farthest corner, he could not well see, but he remarked that she was surrounded by those dainty comforts which bespeak the lady. From time to time she bent her veiled head forward, as if to catch a glimpse of the passing scenery.

Notwithstanding his apparent fatigue and *blasé* manner, the young man seemed unconsciously drawn to look toward his opposite neighbor with some curiosity.

All being in readiness, the shrill whistle announced the start, the engine sent forth a volume of smoke, the steam whizzed and fizzed, and the mammoth train once more flew on—on by wood and meadow; on by hamlet and village; over hills and rocks; on, on, as though seconds were lives, as though there were no time to lose on the beauties of nature.

At length a halt; the guard called the name of a university town; the old servant slept on, but the other two occupants of the coupé, as if awakened from the dead, started to their feet and stood facing each other

in the narrow passage ; eye met eye ; the hands were instinctively outstretched but quickly withdrawn ; the blood rushed to their cheeks and temples ; words seemed ready to pass the parted lips ; but no, dark clouds hovered over, and the sunshine of impulse was obscured ; both sank into their seats and were strangers once more.

Again the express flew on, cheered by the *hochs* of a party of students, but leaving behind it a grave of dead youth. Neither of the travellers again looked toward the other ; on the contrary, their faces were steadfastly turned to their respective windows, and their eyes wandered far, far away. Gone, gone was their happiness ; gone like the passing scenes, gone like the curling smoke. They could not command their thoughts, for their brains were burning, and their hearts seemed unable to restrain cries of agony as the cold, clear moon lit up the hill-tops and the stream they both knew so well.

Burning tears rose to the young girl's eyes, and a deep longing so possessed her that she looked across, as if so deep a feeling must be reciprocated ; but the young man was as erect as a marble statue, and looked persistently into the night. This froze her to the soul ; the returned, unopened letter stood out before her, and a wall of adamant seemed to rise between them.

And he—what were his thoughts ? Did not remembrance bring back that long railroad ride when he laughed at distance and counted the moments until he saw her who now was before him ? when he thought no effort too great in order to spend a few hours in her

company? She whom he then sought now sits before him; he can hear her breathe and feel the slight movements of her figure. What would he not then have given for such moments! and now she has no charms for him. As if impelled by some inner force, he looked around. Yes, there are the delicate features, the long black lashes, the full lips, the broad forehead, and the waving hair, all more beautiful than ever, and yet he turns away!

Where had he last seen that face? Oh, horror! in a newspaper that called all to come and look on the beautiful circus-rider. He closed his eyes in order to shut out the sight.

On goes the train until the level plains are regained. The romantic hills have vanished like the romance of their lives; God help them! Will life be as monotonous for them as this flat country lying in the melancholy gray of the early morning?

On, on, hour follows hour, and still they are in motion not more bewildering than their thoughts, where question and prayer and yearning remain unanswered. Suddenly the shrill whistle announces their arrival at a well-known town in Southern Germany. The maid awakes, and in an excited manner collects all the packages ready to leave the train. Nora (for it is she) moves mechanically; it is necessary to pass him. For a moment her eyes rest on him, not startled as before, but in quiet despair. A softening sorrow seems to steal on him as he looks furtively on the pale, sad face; he half stretches out his hand to help her, but at the same mo-

ment a gentleman enters the coupé and gives her a cordial welcome. With a slight inclination of the head she left, and entered a carriage which was waiting.

Curt looked after them as if gazing on a spirit. The guard entered, and in a loquacious manner said, "Surely his highness could not find fault with the company I gave him. The lady is well known here ; she is the great rider, the daughter of the renowned Karsten, who arrived the day before yesterday in a special train. Will your highness not take a cup of coffee ? The morning air is cold," he added, as he noticed Curt's pale face.

Curt felt chilled in every limb, but he turned away and did not make any answer, so the guard was deterred from further conversation, and went to seek some more social traveller.

Curt is alone in the empty coupé. She who had been with him for so many hours is gone. The opportunity is lost, the opportunity which perhaps had been vouchsafed him by a kind Providence to have all explained. The word remained unspoken, the tongue paralyzed, the lips closed.

"Nora ! Nora !" he cried, with his hands covering his face. All the old wounds reopened, and all the old love sprang to life. "Nora, Nora, why did I not speak ?"

The sun was high in the heavens when he arrived at his destination. The liveried groom had recognized him, and stood, hat in hand, to tell him that the carriage was waiting for him. The equipage was perfectly ap-

pointed, and the ponies tossed their heads high, as if conscious of the admiration they excited. But all this was lost on the weary traveller, who threw himself carelessly into the vehicle, and closing his eyes, did not see the handsome avenue that he entered or the palatial house he approached.

At least ten times that day Lily had asked herself, "Will he come?" and gone to the window to see if there was any sign of her cousin's arrival. At length the tramp of the horses' feet on the bridge announced the approach of the expected guest. Lily hastened to the drawing-room to receive her cousin with all due ceremony, and waited for him with mingled feelings of joy and timidity.

The groom came in to say that the count begged to be excused; he had retired to his room, and found it impossible to appear after so long and fatiguing a journey, but he would try to be down in an hour.

Lily's bright look disappeared. Joy, particularly the joy of being reunited, is quickly chilled by delay.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THAT was a quiet journey," remarked old Anne, as she rubbed her sleepy eyes and took a seat by her young mistress in the carriage. Old Anne had remained faithful to the director's family, and was now Nora's special attendant. "Nora, my baby, I believe you are chilled," she said, as she pulled the travelling rug closer around her charge. "This comes from this night travelling, and running round the world is not good for either young or old bones."

The carriage drew up before one of the first hotels, and the person who had met them at the station again appeared and said, "The director arrived yesterday evening ; everything is arranged for the morning after next if you are not too fatigued, miss."

Nora did not seem to hear him, and went upstairs without taking further notice of him.

"Very ungracious," muttered Landolfo, "completely spoiled ; that will soon be cured, my pretty one. If I do not mistake, that was Count Degenthal who looked out of the coupé. I hope it was not a rendezvous. However, it does not matter ; we have seen to it ; that is all spoiled for *la bella Donna*. Perhaps that was the cause of her ladyship's haughtiness ; there will soon come a day of reckoning," he added, with a spite-

ful sneer, as he entered the restaurant of the hotel to drown his resentment in some choice liqueur.

Old Anne, as she had many a time done for her mother, now put Nora's room in order, darkened the windows, smoothed the pillows, and laid out her dear charge's soft wrapper, that she might get some rest after her weary night's travel. Nora passively allowed herself to be waited on, and lay down perfectly silent. The old woman shook her head, and muttered, "This restless life is bringing her just where her mother was. She will end like her mother, if she was ten times as strong, my poor miss."

Nora was left alone to get some rest, but it would not come. Everything seemed to move and rush and whiz, and there opposite to her she saw Curt, sitting still and cold. It was a stormy night just three years ago that she sought rest after her first appearance in public, entirely overcome, as she was to-night, by mental and physical excitement. Her profession had since taken her into every country in Europe. Landolfo's anticipations were more than realized with regard to her success. Her beauty and dexterity had more than restored all the old glory of Karsten's circus. Nora's name always filled the largest houses. Her father had left nothing undone to save her feelings. She never mixed with the other members of the troupe or took part in any exhibition of a theatrical nature, her appearance being strictly restricted to artistic riding, and she was always mounted on the best horses of her father's renowned stables.

She had thought that she could never bear that first evening, that she would certainly die from the double sorrow of humiliation and lost love ; but it is not so easy to die. She was created of enduring material, and the consciousness of the purity of her intention in the offering she made sustained her. It was a bitter thing when her letter was returned unopened, but it came when sorrow had almost benumbed her heart. The envelope was so covered with various postmarks that she tried to persuade herself that perhaps it had never reached Curt. She looked forward to the day when she could explain all her motives to him, and, in the mean time, her life and conduct would be her best protectors. Wherever she appeared she commanded the respect and admiration of all the fashionable men, so much so that her step-mother tried to cheer her by assuring her that, with a little encouragement, she could have ten noblemen at her feet instead of the one who had abandoned her. Nora shook her head silently, and never accepted any homage, no matter how respectful ; never cast one look of gratification to her crowd of admirers. It was an accepted fact that she did not even take one of the floral offerings thrown to her in such abundance. One cavalier, more persevering than the others, hit on the idea of sending his bouquets direct to the house, and it required all the persuasion of her step-mother to prevent her sending them back. Only the fear of making enemies for her father, to whom she had devoted her life, induced her to keep them.

She declined all the little suppers and feasts which

were given ostensibly to honor her father, but in reality to draw the daughter from her persistent retirement. A few minutes in the riding school or a turn in the corridor of the theatre, and even then by the side of her father, were the only occasions on which the most ardent of her admirers could boast of meeting her. In the early morning, when society was still asleep, she might have been seen going or coming from church.

This had been Nora's life, but the night after her long ride in the Vienna express a veil seemed to fall from her eyes, and with it all hope vanished. The meeting in the train made her understand the cold contempt which had returned her letter unopened. Spurned ! spurned ! Torn from the heart which was all and everything to her. He had found no excuse for her conduct ; he had no sympathy or compassion for her to lighten that night of despair. Her face lay hidden in the pillows, her hands were buried in her hair.

In the midst of her agony a feeling of justice arose ; the broken heart rebelled against the injustice it was suffering. Who was he who would deign her a word or a look ? Had he not broken his vow to be her helper and protector ? and yet with the first wave of adversity he had abandoned her ! True, she thought in the bitterness of her soul, she had released him from his promise ; she had absolved him from all duty ; but he had not raised a finger to help her. He had accepted his freedom to let her sink.

Why should she grieve ? He had accepted his freedom most willingly, while she had sacrificed every

thought to the shadow of his love. The indignant blood rose to her face ; the deserted heart yearned for some excitement to fill its aching void. Why should she try to be better than those among whom fate had cast her ? All happiness had fled.

It was long before this unhealthy excitement was quieted in Nora's heart. It is only when the angry waters have abated that we see the ravages they have made. When she arose, the whole expression of her countenance was changed. Her eyes burned with an angry fire, her lips wore a haughty curve. As she was doing up her hair some one knocked at the door, and a magnificent bouquet was handed in. Her first impulse was to refuse it, as usual ; but a second thought made her bury her face in its depths, and with a feverish impatience inhale its fragrance.

She was at no loss to guess from whom the flowers came. An admirer of princely rank had followed her for several months with those costly offerings, which to-day for the first time she accepted.

" I can bring them all to my feet," she said, with a proud toss of her head. " I can captivate them all ; I can command them with a wave of my hand ; I can make these haughty men suffer as I have suffered. I will show him that I have only to stretch out my hand to accept what he refuses."

When Nora came to her father a little later in order to receive his instructions with regard to the coming exhibition, he was astonished to see the interest she manifested in it.

Every tongue was busy with the beauty of the fair Karsten, and pronounced her more charming than ever. The coldness for which she had been hitherto criticised had disappeared, which was attributed to the triumphal tour she had just completed in France. She began to take part in character performances, and became quite famous in a particularly romantic piece which drew large houses. It was taken from the fable of Libussa, Bohemia's beautiful queen, and one of the scenes, in which Libussa and her amazons attack their male enemies, gave an opportunity for some remarkable feats of equestrianism. The grace of the amazons as they put the men to flight, and finally the close, when Libussa (Nora's part) sends an arrow through the hero, Sharka, and then falls herself dead, called forth the wildest enthusiasm from full houses.

The troupe was making its annual visit to Vienna, and when the play of Libussa was announced, the circus was attended by the most fashionable audience. Nora looked most dazzlingly beautiful as, mounted on a black steed, she entered, surrounded by her amazons. She wore a golden coat of armor, with a full pleated skirt of cloth of silver, and a silver helmet, which left her features visible, and beneath which her long black hair fell down her neck. She sat her horse with a strength and ease that made her the embodiment of the ideal heroine. The combination of matchless riders and superb horses made a brilliant spectacle, but every eye was fastened on Libussa, whose magnificent presence and graceful riding outshone even such perfection.

Applause followed applause, and at the scene of the amazons' last triumph, when they rushed out with Libussa at their head, her hair flying, her eyes on fire, and her lance raised, one general cry of "The Valkyria, the shield-maid!" rent the air. Then came the moment when she is to send the death-arrow to the heart of the last of their enemies, and die herself in the struggle. On this occasion, as Nora's many admirers were straining all their attention in expectation of the telling scene, she seemed palsied, and a deathly pallor overspread her countenance. Her step-mother, who personated one of the amazons, recalled her to the embarrassment of the position. She seemed to awaken from a dream, and played her part to the end so effectively that the audience, looking on the whole occurrence as the perfection of acting, were wild with enthusiasm.

Fortunately the plot required that Nora was to be carried out dying, for she could not have stood up. She did not hear the storm of encores nor see the bouquets and crowns which fell at her feet, and on being taken from the arena, she was overcome by hysteria.

In the midst of a group of officers she had seen a man clad in ecclesiastical robes looking at her earnestly, but not entering into the surrounding enthusiasm.

One of the officers addressed the priest in the following words, "Reverend chaplain, that is right; has this marvel of the ring tempted you to the city? The countess seems to have quite deserted us."

"The ill-health of her son has made her retire com-

pletely from society. I am now on my way to see Count Curt, who has again been taken ill at his cousin's," replied our old friend the chaplain.

"Has Curt finally returned from his wandering?" continued the officer, "and at his cousin's? That will please his mamma. What was really the matter with him?"

"The climatic fever seemed to have shattered his constitution. He never quite recovered from the brain fever which he had at Pera. We were beginning to be quite encouraged about him, but now all the old symptoms have returned."

"This is very sad," said the officer kindly. "It was an unfortunate idea of his mother's to send him away; but her heart seemed set on it for some reason or another. I trust you will find him better."

"Thank you. He expressed a wish to see me, so I set out immediately. The countess has been with him for some weeks."

"I shall go over to see my old friend, and to pay my respect to the coy little Countess Lily. Where is the younger son, Count Nicholas?"

"With his regiment. He has grown to be a big fellow in the last few years."

"Indeed? But he will never equal Curt, the best fellow that ever lived. It would be a pity if he should not get strong. Come, reverend sir; something seems to attract our friends."

As they approached a group of young officers, who surrounded their captain of the horse, one of them was

heard to say, "Did you ever see anything more beautiful? She is charming; and her riding! Captain, she seems to improve all the time."

"I can't agree with you," replied the latter. "She used to please me more; she seemed so completely to forget herself and be almost a part of her horse. To-night it was not so. But see; is that not Prince N——? They say his admiration for the pretty Karsten makes him follow the troupe everywhere."

"Yes, they tell wonderful things of his devotion to her; but they say she is engaged to the manager, who is madly jealous."

The chaplain heaved a deep sigh.

"Reverend chaplain, will you join us?" asked the captain respectfully. "A little cool refreshment will not come amiss."

"I thank you, no. I think I have had enough of worldliness for one evening, and I have to make an early start in the morning. Good-night, gentlemen."

CHAPTER XIX.

EARLY next morning a note was handed to Nora requiring an answer. She had had a feverish night, and was now sitting at her table trying to write a letter, and tearing up each attempt. The note, which was on a visiting-card, requested her to see the writer. Nora hesitated, then sent the desired permission, and immediately seemed to regret it ; but it was too late to change her mind, for the chaplain appeared on the threshold, stretched out his hand to her, and looked her kindly and earnestly in the eye.

Remembrance after remembrance connected with him rushed upon her, and tears sprang to her eyes as she said sadly, " You see me a rider, a circus-rider, after all." She threw herself on the sofa, and covered her face with her hands.

" God be thanked for these tears," replied the chaplain, laying his hand on her head. " My poor child, I thank God that it is such a sacrifice to you. Yesterday I feared that you were reconciled to it."

" Would to God I were !" cried Nora bitterly. " Would that it were no sacrifice ; would that I could forget the past, and only remember that now I have wealth, admiration, beauty, adulation ! Why, oh why, do I cling to the old thoughts ? Now you come to recall those thoughts, to renew the struggle. I wanted

to ask you not to come, to leave me in peace. Oh, why did you come?"

"Why did I come? To keep a promise made to a dying mother to be a friend and adviser to her child. Would to God that I had come before she took a step so disastrous to herself and to others!"

"It was not disastrous to others," interrupted Nora. "They soon found it easy to forget and to despise."

"No one knows what another felt and suffered. Possibly he has been as cruelly deceived as you. Possibly all is destined to lead you to the goal."

"The goal can never be reached," she cried piteously.

"Not the one for which we hoped, but that to which all ways may lead; through the path of sacrifice, which is God's providence."

"Do you think the career on which I have entered is particularly conducive to such a result?" she asked scornfully.

"There is no career which cannot be sanctified," replied the chaplain, in the same unruffled tone. "Yes, the greater the temptation the greater the merit."

"Do you consider it an easy thing to overcome temptation?" she cried obstinately. "Look there," and she pointed to the floral offerings of the preceding night—"look there!" and she crushed the heap of perfumed notes and threw them from her. "Do you think that all this makes no impression on the mind, does not corrupt the heart? Do you believe that the ear can remain deaf to applause and the heart always indifferent when it has been robbed of all happiness? Since my last

anchor was broken, since he showed me that he despised me, my heart has sought reparation in what the world offers, cost what it will ! Oh, I know that I shall retrograde. I shall learn to love and enjoy life as thousands no better than I have done before me, as thousands after me will do."

The priest did not argue with her. His deep knowledge of the world taught him that he must not frighten the already sorely wounded soul.

"Man's love at best," he said, "is but a poor anchor ; but what makes you think that he despises you ?"

The blush deepened on her cheek ; she could not find words to express what she desired to say ; she walked over to the window, and pressed her forehead against the pane.

"Do you ever hear from him ?" pursued the chaplain.

"Some weeks since I came in the express train from Paris to a certain Austrian town. A gentleman who no longer recognized me sat in the coupé with me," she said, in a choked voice.

The chaplain started and said, "You travelled with him ?"

Nora nodded and trembled.

This explained the cause of Curt's relapse. Should he tell her the effect of this meeting ? Would it be wise to thus awaken a dangerous hope in her bosom ? Even above prudence stand out the truth and kindness which may soothe the wounded heart, which does not grudge the drop of healing balm, which will raise the drooping spirit. This was the conviction which made

the chaplain say, "Count Degenthal has been sick ever since that journey. I am now on my way to see him, for he is not able to leave his cousin's house."

Nora turned her head and gasped, "Dangerously sick?"

"It seems to be a relapse of his long sickness. The doctor attributes it to nervousness for which he cannot account."

"Relapse!" repeated Nora. "Of what sickness are you speaking?"

"Do you know nothing of it?"

Nora shook her head and said, "I only knew that he was abroad, attaché to some legation."

"And you believed that he heard of the change with indifference? For three long years the announcement, for which he was not prepared, threw him on a sick-bed," said the priest, and then in his own quiet, clear way he related all that had occurred.

Deathly pale Nora listened, and at the close exclaimed, "Oh, my God! Sick and languishing all those years!"

Sick and languishing on her account! In her deep sorrow she had thought only of herself, never of him! His delicate organization had suffered even more exquisitely than she had. He whom she had come to hate on account of his supposed indifference was broken down in mind and body! She now despised her own youth and health and strength.

"Oh, good God, this is terrible!" she repeated. "I would not have believed it."

"We are prone to be unjust when we allow sorrow to master us, particularly if we believe ourselves wronged."

"Father, father!" she cried, "it was not my fault. You do not know what brought me to this, and my lips refuse to lisp it. I wrote to Curt, confiding all to him. Unheard he condemned me. My letter was returned unopened without a word."

"Did he not read it? Then he heard of your appearance in public from other sources, and that embittered him, for he confided in you implicitly; hence, also, his sickness. Nora, give me your confidence," pleaded the good man earnestly.

"Yes, I will; but it must be as sacred as the sacramental secret, for it concerns others as well as myself."

She threw herself on her knees, as if to confess her own guilt, and repeated all the occurrences of the unhappy day when her father's life lay in the balance. She told of the soul's agony which induced her vow.

The chaplain listened to her in silence. He had never believed her frivolous or untrue, and had tried in vain to find an explanation for her conduct, or grounds to excuse it. But the greatness of her sacrifice exceeded all his imagination. He was filled with pity for the young creature who had been capable of such heroic self-sacrifice, and had only reaped contempt.

"Have I done wrong? Oh, do not condemn me!" she cried. "I destroyed my happiness with my own hand."

"God forbid that I should judge you, my poor child,"

said the priest earnestly. "May He direct me what to counsel you. Your filial love and self-sacrifice sanctify your resolution, and will bring God's blessing upon you. Life has been harder for you than even mother-love anticipated. You gave up all in order to save your father."

"But have I saved him, have I saved him?" she whispered. "That is the question that has troubled me for some time. Oh, I cannot mention what now oppresses me, even though I have tried to close my eyes to many things, to accept life as light and superficial, for thought is agonizing. Landolfo is my father's evil spirit, and exercises complete control over him. My father is no more what he was," she said, with burning cheeks. "This life is corrupting every one. Perhaps if I had not made this sacrifice, he would have been forced to give it up."

"You did what you believed to be right. That justifies us before God and our own conscience. Do not trouble yourself about this. We cannot foresee. But now that your father's circumstances are so much improved, could you not withdraw?"

"No, no ; he says that I am necessary to his fortune. Landolfo, I fear, will so arrange it that I never can retire. He sets everything against me."

"Against you ? He cannot set your father against his darling. Are you not well treated ?" asked the chaplain.

"I do not mean that," she replied, with a sad smile. "Every one treats me well ; every one spoils me ; every

one flatters me. I am necessary. But he whom I named has personal plans on account of which he daily increases his influence over my father. They cannot conquer me !” she exclaimed, with flaming eye, “ but one plan is succeeded by another. You can hardly comprehend the intrigues in such a life as this. I would not dare leave my father yet.”

“ Can you not be more explicit ?” asked the chaplain.

“ No, no. It is like a ghost, ever reappearing.”

“ Nora,” said the priest seriously, after several minutes’ consideration, “ fulfil your mission, hard though it be. It is higher than personal happiness ; it will lead you in perilous paths. Keep your heart pure, and no danger will overcome you. You will be the guardian spirit of your father, and grace will not be wanting to you. Is it not the providence of God that has sent me here ? Has He not sent you consolation in explaining away much that threatened to overpower your soul and poison your sacrifice ? Go on firm and strong, but do not barter your birthright for vanity and worldly ambition.”

“ But how long, how long ? Shall I not weaken and fail ?” she sighed.

“ As long as God wills. He can in a moment accomplish what seems to us impossible,” said the priest, rising.

Nora also arose, and placing her hand in his, said, “ Yes, it was the providence of God that sent you. I stand on the brink of a precipice ; pray that I may not fall.”

At that moment there was a knock on the door, and the director entered. "Oh, you have visitors!" he said, with apparent astonishment. "Why, your reverence, what kind chance sends you to us? It is a pleasure to see you." He reached out his hand, but there was a tone in his voice and a manner to his welcome that belied his words.

The chaplain found Karsten changed; his figure had grown stouter, his features were bloated, his eyes were weary and restless; even his step had lost its elasticity. Nora explained to her father the reason of the chaplain's presence, which reminded the latter that it was time for him to start on his journey.

"I fear that this meeting has over-excited you, my child," said the director suspiciously; and turning to the visitor, he continued, "All has turned out as older heads anticipated. Young people must learn by experience. My daughter is now very happy, and has no doubt told you that her life is not so hard as it at first seemed. Was I not right in saying that she would be a success? Could any one have a greater triumph than she had last night?"

"The Emperor of Russia was a true prophet," answered the chaplain.

"Yes, yes. She has quite thrown her old father in the shade," said the director, with a loud laugh. "Nora, I don't know how many bouquets are awaiting you in Russia. She is my staff and pride, but a spoiled princess." He put his arm around her and drew her to him.

A certain hesitation in the director's voice and flushed spots on his cheeks gave the chaplain a suspicion which would have grown to a certainty had he known that he had just breakfasted with Landolfo. After deep draughts of good sherry, the latter informed Karsten of the clergyman's visit, and recommended him to interrupt it before his daughter's head was filled with nonsense.

These little breakfasts, always at the director's expense, had become rather frequent lately, and generally with the same result. Nora's uneasiness at Landolfo's growing and evil influence over her father was only too well grounded. It extended not only to a complete control of the business ; he took every means of making himself agreeable to Karsten, and encouraged an inclination toward drinking which had developed in the latter since his sickness. Decreasing bodily strength and inability to bear much excitement seem to call for stimulants, which makes the years at the close of middle life dangerous to some men in particular.

"The prince called to inquire for you, Nora, and to invite you to a little excursion," said Karsten, in the same tones.

"I thank him, father, but I hope you told him that I never accept such invitations."

"But you certainly can go accompanied by your parents. I trust, your reverence, that you are not going to make a nun of my little daughter."

"I agree with Miss Nora in this matter," said the priest. "A young lady in her position cannot be too careful."

“Bah, bah ! do not put such things in her head, reverend sir ; she is already haughty enough. She will be my ruin.”

“Father, if you really mean this,” said Nora, very quietly, “I am quite ready to retire. You know well that I am not in love with the calling, and can easily find another.”

“You see how independent our princess has grown,” muttered her father, patting her cheeks. “She knows we could not spare her ; but, my daughter, do not place your father in such a predicament,” he pleaded in a maudlin voice.

Nora, to whom the whole scene was inexpressibly disagreeable, reached out her hand to the chaplain, saying sadly, “I fear we are detaining you from those who are longing for your presence. I thank you sincerely for your visit, which has done me so much good. Do not be afraid that I shall again be tempted to be unsubmissive.”

“God will help you. Perhaps what I have told you will add to your suffering, but it will be a shield to save you from worse.”

“And it shall not be in vain ; to-day you have armed me anew,” she replied, with a firm pressure of the hand.

The chaplain turned away, overcome by his feelings. She appeared to him more cruelly orphaned than when a little child.

The director seemed troubled, and repeated, throwing himself into a chair, “Do not make her a nun.”

When the chaplain left the room, Nora followed him, and with trembling lips said, " But one word. Let me know how you find him. Do not speak to him of me ; he could not bear it, and it would be useless."

A kind hand-shake and a nod of assent were the priest's only answer ; but as he walked slowly away, he pondered on the resignation and heroism which are possible to a true woman's heart, that out of pure love prefers to be forgotten rather than inflict pain on the beloved.

The knowledge of having been mourned made Nora heroic.

CHAPTER XX.

LILY'S joy at once more seeing her cousin was short-lived. His illness became so alarming that she called a doctor, and telegraphed to her aunt. The countess arrived next day, and the reunion after so many years of separation was indeed sad. Her son's pale face, emaciated figure, and weary look were all evidences of the shock his constitution had received.

Was she not filled with remorse as she sat for hours by her son's bedside, while he lay with closed eyes, too tired to be able to listen to her talk, too indifferent to ask about home, too cold and reserved to return her tenderness, or to give her his confidence? It seemed as if his young heart was ice-bound and frozen.

She was not one to grieve over what was past. She had done only what she had believed to be her duty, forgetting that there is no duty so easily performed as that which is self-imposed. She flattered herself that the climate, the intrigues of others, and her son's own weakness were responsible for his sickness. She solaced herself with the thought of how necessary it would be to influence him, how dangerous to leave him to himself, and how careful she must be to prevent the awakening of old recollections.

Every one but the chaplain was at a loss to account for Curt's relapse, and as the latter remained so re-

served, he was, of course, silent. He intimated to the countess that there were things which it was better to leave to time than to try to combat.

It was September before any sign of recovery could be noticed in Curt. The autumn's sun shone with the summer's glow, without its heat, over the green lawn and the flowery parterre on which the "summer parlor" of Lily's castle opened. It was an ideal resting-place for the weary invalid. The graceful pillars, the solid walls of the castle, the urns of rare plants which ornamented the terrace and almost changed it into a flowery paradise, the landscape, with its foreground of luxurious meadows and views of hill and forest—all combined to make the "summer parlor" a delight and a comfort.

Since he had left his sick-bed, Curt spent many hours in this fairy bower in an apparently half-dreamy state. This outward appearance of quiet, however, served but to conceal the inner torments of his soul, which the accidental meeting with Nora had awakened. It was a ceaseless ebb and flow of feelings—the reawakened love, the desire to crush it out, the regret which would come, the doubt whether he had done right or not to have condemned her without hearing. . Physical weakness made clear thought impossible. Rest, rest was what he craved, and he would have almost accepted annihilation to find rest and forgetfulness; but forgetfulness does not come at our bidding—yea, the more we crave it the farther it flies. Of all those about him, Lily distressed him the least, and he was more at ease with her than with any of the rest of the household.

She looked on him as the long-absent one for whom she had longed, the invalid for whose life she trembled, and whose recovery she hailed with a delight she could hardly conceal. To see him under her own roof and to minister to his comforts stirred her naturally lethargic nature. Lily's presence did not detract from the charm of the terrace ; her fresh complexion and fair hair showed to advantage in the daylight, while in the evening, in the drawing-room, she seemed uninteresting and dull. The plain, every-day dress of the housewife suited her better than the adornments of society. By degrees Curt came to the conclusion that his little cousin had improved during his absence ; her figure had grown slighter and her face less round, and when she laughed two becoming dimples appeared ; and since his return Lily often laughed in her quiet way. He observed her with growing interest as she busied herself with little household cares or wandered among her flower-beds or listened to the petitions of her poor, duties which, by the way, seemed to call her very much in the neighborhood of the terrace, possibly because she did not wish to neglect her watchfulness over her guest. When Curt called her from this busy round of cares she obeyed with happy alacrity, and her little commonplace remarks did not excite him. In his present state of physical and mental weariness he dreaded all excitement, and with the security of youth, he believed that all interest in life was dead to him. With returning strength the life of Göhlitz grew more endurable to him. The presence of the countess supplied all neces-

sary chaperonage, and Curt's return from his travels brought some of his old friends to visit him.

On one particular day a pleasant party was collected on the terrace, some of the neighbors and some of Curt's friends, who had arrived from the city by train, the captain of the horse, whom the chaplain had met at the circus, being of the number. It was one of those days when the sun shines brightest, and every one appears at his best. The young hostess, with a blue veil thrown over her yellow locks, looked like a pretty flax blossom. Those wonderful beautifiers, love and happiness, gave her an animated expression which was unusual to her, and as she sat beneath a luxuriant oleander-tree, surrounded by the young men of the party, she accepted their homage with the cool indifference of one whose affections were already engaged. Curt must be pardoned if he could not but notice that her most frequent glances were for him ; where is the man whose vanity is not flattered by being singled out of a crowd of admirers ? With the easy confidence of cousinship, Curt sat next the little hostess, his arm resting on the back of her chair, and his fingers toying with the band which bound her hair ; he spoke with unusual warmth and fluency, calling an expression to his face which was very becoming.

"All offering allegiance ?" said the chaplain, as he joined the party.

Lily looked at him joyously.

"Oho ! reverend sir," exclaimed the captain, in his most jovial voice ; "you cannot blame us, when

you yourself so lately paid allegiance to youth and beauty."

"What do you mean?" asked the priest, very much astonished.

"Now, now," continued the other, "just remember; there was no time to stay with poor us—just starting on a journey—and the next thing a card is sent to the beauty of beauties. You did not suspect that I was standing near you at the hotel when you asked for her address. I hope that in your priestly zeal you did not preach her too severe a sermon. The Karsten circus would be nothing without the brilliant Nora."

"Oh, you allude to my recent visit to Miss Nora Karsten?" said the chaplain, annoyed by the untimely jest. "Yes, yes; I hunted her up, for I have known her since her childhood."

Curt shrank back; Lily's hair-band fell from his fingers; then he leaned back in his chair, to all appearance perfectly indifferent.

The countess, who was sitting near the group, raised her head and looked as if she could not believe her ears.

"Every one must acknowledge," continued the captain, without the slightest suspicion of the excitement he was creating, "that nothing can surpass her on horseback. Degenthal, she has not her equal in equestrianism. Did you ever come across her in your travels?"

"No," replied Curt laconically.

"Oh, well, you positively must run up to the city; it is well worth the trouble. In the character of Libussa

she is a grand success ; even his reverence here was quite enthusiastic."

"Not so much enthusiastic as deeply sympathetic," said the chaplain. "Fate has compelled her to adopt this career. She was educated for different things."

"Curt," said the countess, interrupting the conversation, "it is growing cold, you must not remain out longer ; had you not better go in ?"

The young man did not answer, but neither did he follow the advice ; he took his straw hat and drew it so low that his expression could not be seen.

Not to be diverted from his subject, the captain continued, "Why fate ? She is the daughter of a circus director—nothing more natural than that she should follow the career ; but I have heard that her conduct is irreproachable."

"It is reported that she is engaged to her father's manager," said one of the other gentlemen.

"Yes, and it is also said that it was out of love for him that she appears in public," added some one else.

"I believe that to be a malicious rumor," said the chaplain decidedly.

"It is positively asserted that she had an early love affair, but I forget the particulars," continued the captain.

"There are always many stories of that nature in circulation, but without foundation," answered the priest ; "and, as I said before, I regret exceedingly that the lady has taken this step ; but there are circumstances

which it is very hard to control. She has my honest respect."

"Curt," called out the countess impatiently, "it is very imprudent of you to remain out; the autumn fogs are very dangerous. How can you expect to recover, when you are so imprudent?"

"I see no necessity for going in," he replied, rising and going to the door of the parlor, where he stood as if determined to hear all.

"I used to know Nora Karsten very well," said Lily; "and, furthermore, I loved her dearly. We were at the same school. I could not believe it when I heard that she had appeared in public, and I am sure the chaplain is right when he says that only some unfortunate circumstance drove her to it. Has her father lost his fortune?"

"It does not look so, countess; the proceeds from the circus seem to increase every year."

"What, then, can it be? Poor Nora!" said Lily thoughtfully.

"If she has been educated as you say, countess, it is indeed sad," remarked an old gentleman. "Associating with the members of the troupe alone must be unbearable."

"Poor Nora!" replied Lily, and at the same moment she met the troubled look of her aunt, who was gazing at her son; and supposing that she understood the cause of her evident alarm, said, "I think we are all doing very wrong to remain out-doors. Come, Curt, it is more comfortable inside."

The company entered the house at the suggestion of their young hostess, but they did not find the change at all more comfortable. The former mirth seemed to have given way to a general depression. With increasing anxiety the countess went nearer to her son, who had thrown himself in a chair, looking pale and weary, and the visitors hastened their departure, fearing to tire the convalescent.

As the captain was going away, Lily asked him in a low voice if the circus was still in the city.

"So far as I know there has been no announcement of their departure ; but I shall inquire and let you know, countess."

"No, no, thank you," replied Lily hurriedly, as she saw her aunt observing her.

As soon as the guests had gone the countess approached the chaplain, and said to him excitedly, "My dear chaplain, how could you be so imprudent as to speak as you did, and revive such remembrances in my son?"

"I believe, countess, those remembrances have never slept, and that they are the cause of his illness."

"Oh, nonsense ; the climate was the cause of his illness. Now it is of the first importance to keep them apart ; this was the only thing that reconciled me to his long absence. I have been most careful to avoid any approach to this subject."

"Madam, the greatest human efforts are but weak. Count Curt and Nora Karsten have already met."

"In Heaven's name, how can that be?"

“Accidentally they travelled in the same railway carriage, and Curt’s last relapse was the result of this meeting. You may judge whether remembrance is dead or sleeping.”

“My God ! my God !” cried the countess. “Just as I was beginning to have the greatest hopes that my plans were succeeding to have him marry his cousin.”

“Countess, it would be better to refrain from making plans. Leave all things to Heaven to decide what is best. You have nothing to fear from Nora; she has resigned all claims on him.”

“If you had only not contradicted what the gentleman said, and let Curt hear how she was spoken of.”

“But, madam, it was untrue, and an untruth never brings good,” said the chaplain, in a kind but decided voice. “Truth and justice demanded that I should speak, for I am in possession of facts.”

“But what made it necessary for you to renew the acquaintance of this family ? I was so happy in believing that all was at an end.”

“It was not a question of a visit, countess, but of the salvation of a soul and of duty. I perceived that misfortune and disappointment were placing the young girl in great danger, and I wished by my presence to save her and to keep my promise to her dying mother. I hope that, with God’s help, I have succeeded.”

“At all events, she will continue now to ride. I always prophesied that it would be so. Now, what are we to do for my poor son ?”

“Do nothing,” said the priest with authority. “I

fear too much has already been done. It has cost the health of your son and the happiness of this poor girl. We are apt by misdirected zeal to fall from one evil into a greater."

CHAPTER XXI.

WOULD he never more have rest ? This was Curt's thought during the long night, as he tossed about restlessly ; in the morning as he arose, tired and weary ; in his easy-chair, as he sat silent and alone. The fresh autumn breeze brought no relief to his brow. Since the memorable conversation of yesterday his thoughts were in a whirl of trouble which he could not appease ; every word he had heard burned into his soul. The flippant way in which her name was used, and the defence, the respect, and the tender pity of the priest alike woke doubts of the justice of his own conduct. He heard the chaplain speak of a cruel fate of which she had spoken. What was it ? Had he not, perhaps, sent back the explanation unopened ? Had he not condemned her unheard ? What was to prevent him now from going and finding out the reason of what had passed ? Would such an explanation excuse her for having killed love and broken her word just as he had given her proof of his constancy ? When he thought of the moment that he held her clasped in his arms, he could have cried out to see himself so deceived. Then he swore never to let her name pass his lips, and never to ask an explanation. He pressed his hand to his temples, as if to repress all thought.

A slight noise made him raise his head, and he saw

Lily standing before him. He aroused himself, determined not to allow any one to witness his trouble ; he welcomed his cousin cordially.

She sat opposite him, and was evidently absorbed in some thought which she found difficulty in expressing. At length she said, in a disjointed manner, "Curt, would you kindly—would you this afternoon kindly accompany me for a couple of hours on a little journey, which I would like to make with you, but without your mamma?"

He looked more astonished than pleased, and said, "On a little journey with you? You know, dear child, how everything tires me. Where is it to?"

His manner yesterday would perhaps have given her reason to expect a more friendly reception ; her countenance showed plainly her chagrin.

"I thought that a drive in the open air would do you good," she said ; "but if it would tire you so much—" and she prepared to leave him.

It is hard for a man to refuse the first request of one who has been his kind hostess and faithful nurse for several weeks. Curt saw that her feelings were wounded, and regretted his ungracious answer. The only reparation in his power was to assure her that he was ready to be her attendant knight.

Lily's good-humor was quickly restored, and she did not take long to take him at his word.

"The journey will do you good," she said, "and you must promise to do all I ask you, and as I wish. I shall explain later. I take your mamma's approval for

granted, so as to avoid her disapproval—that is, if you make no objections, Curtie.”

He made no objections, and having once given consent, did not wish to give the question any more consideration.

The countess was somewhat surprised at the mysterious projects of her niece, with whom she did not always agree on questions of propriety. She would not on any account interfere with anything which tended to bring the cousins together, so she all the more now gave her consent. Lily's plans were always so far removed from any extravagance, that there could be no harm in what she proposed. Like most quiet people, Lily generally carried her point.

“Now you shall know your destination,” she said to Curt, who, to her great annoyance, showed very little curiosity. “We are going to Vienna—not by rail, that would be a pity in such beautiful weather; and the horses can make it in a couple of hours. This will bring us where I want to go, and leave us an hour. I shall send the carriage back, with orders to meet us at the station. Driving in the evening air would not be good for you, so we shall return by train, which takes only a quarter of an hour, bringing us home in good time. Have I not planned all well?”

Curt could only bow his assent. The easy motion and the soft air lulled him into a kind of half sleep, in which his companion's uninteresting conversation was not very clear.

At the end of two hours they arrived at their destina-

tion, and the horses drew up before Lily's town house. The house steward officiously opened the rooms, which always stood in readiness for the young mistress.

It was the first time that Curt had visited the city since his return from the East, and memory crowded on memory as he sat alone, while Lily gave directions to the servants. When she re-entered the drawing-room, the steward handed her tickets. After examining them attentively, she said, "Now, Curtie, if you are rested, let us go."

He looked absently at the tickets which she held in her hand and offered her his arm. The recollections which filled his mind prevented him thinking seriously on Lily's business. "Probably," he thought, "she wants to make some purchases as a surprise for some one." The last time he was here was the day on which he had met Nora, when she pleaded so earnestly with him not to go away. Were her forebodings prophetic? Would not things have been different had he remained near her, and not left her so unprotected?

"Here we are," said Lily, stopping before one of the hotels. "There is some one I want to speak to. Will you please enter with me, and then leave and come for me in half an hour?"

"Can I allow this?" questioned Curt, rather astonished. "I think, in the character of a jealous cousin, I must forbid such a meeting."

"Cousins have no such right," Lily answered gayly. "When I explain all to you later, you will give your approval. Be kind enough to come for me in half an

hour ; I shall be ready." She looked at him imploringly.

At the appointed time he saw Lily's blue veil approaching, and hastened to meet her.

" Well, is the conspiracy working ?" he asked jestingly ; but looking closer at her face, he saw unmistakable traces of tears. " What is the matter, Lily ?" he added anxiously. Notwithstanding the moist eyes, she looked at him smilingly, took his arm, and walked on in silence.

" Now I shall explain all to you," she said, after a while. " It was very good of you to do as I asked of you without any questions. I have called on Nora Karsten."

Curt stood as if electrified, then exclaimed in cold, hard tones, " Nora Karsten at the circus ?"

" Yes, Nora Karsten. Do you find that so improper ? You are aware that I knew her at school. I loved her most of all, for she was so good and pious and kind. She saved me from many a penance, and consoled me in my homesickness. Hundreds of times have I promised her that I would never forget her. Would it be right in me to refuse to recognize her because she is obliged to become a circus-rider ? Probably her father insisted on her following his career. When I heard yesterday that she was here for a short stay, I determined to visit her. Who knows when I shall again have the opportunity ? I thought it would do her good to see that people still loved and respected her. I think it is contemptible to abandon people in misfortune.

My aunt would not have consented to my visit had I asked her, and you would have thought that you must make objections. I was right, was I not, Curtie?" she asked, as she tried to see his face, which was bowed low. What could be the matter, that he was so moved?

"Yes," he said finally, in a weary voice, "you were right. God bless your courage! If you have done wrong, it was in a noble cause."

"Oh, I am so glad you are not angry, Curt. I don't care what my aunt thinks, but if you had disapproved of it, it would have grieved me. Nora is, as the chaplain said, as good and pious as ever, and you can have no idea of her beauty. Her pleasure at seeing me was touching; but I do not believe she is happy. She could not answer me for crying. Just think, she has to ride every day. It is terrible! I could not look at her. I told her that you had accompanied me, for she inquired for you and my aunt. You remember when we travelled in Switzerland you knew her as a little child. But she would not allow me to call you."

All this Lily repeated breathlessly, for the success of her undertaking made her eloquent. She could have still run on, but Curt heard no more; he seemed bewildered. Again Nora was crossing his path unsought. Was this the outcome of his mental struggle, and should he once more let the opportunity pass?

Arrived at the house, he said in a hurried manner, "Can you remain here alone a little while? I saw in the street an old acquaintance to whom I want to speak. We have still two hours to spare."

“Certainly,” said Lily, “but do not let us be late for the train.” Curt ran down the stairs and out into the street, as if he feared giving himself time to change his mind. What did he intend to do? He scarcely knew himself. The only clear idea was that he must not let the opportunity pass.

“Count Degenthal!” cried Nora, a little later, as he stood before her in the most passionate excitement—“Count Degenthal! You have no right to come here!” She tried to rise haughtily, but fell back trembling.

“No right!” he repeated, advancing to her and taking her hand in an iron grasp. “Who has robbed me of the right? Who has thrown the most self-sacrificing love in my face? Who has been disloyal to the most sacred promises out of miserable cowardice or still more miserable vanity? Nora, I want to hate you!” and he flung away the hand he held.

“Curt, Curt, you do not believe what you say! You know that love was my only happiness,” she sobbed in agony.

“That love, that love!” he repeated mockingly, “that love which could not bear the first trial.”

These harsh words seemed to restore Nora’s former pride. She rose, deathly pale but resolute; her lips trembled, but she said distinctly, “You have no right to condemn me, for I confided all to you, and you would not hear me.”

The reproach struck him, and as she stood there, so lovely, so pure, no stain on her brow, her clear eye looking him straight in the face, the old love returned,

and he cried, "Nora, Nora, why did you do it? Do you know what I suffered? Look at me; do you recognize me? In what have I deserved this treatment from you?"

"Forgive me, forgive me," she besought, as she threw her hands over her face. "Oh, my God! It was not my fault; it was a frightful sacrifice! Oh, why was not my life and not thine the price!"

"Do you believe my life is worth living, Nora, since that hour in which my idol fell? Nora, Nora, tell me!" He stopped as if unable to say more, drew her to him, and dragged her hands from her face. His eyes fairly glared on her, as though he would read her through and through.

"Too late, too late!" she whispered. "Oh, Curt, had you but been here!"

Her head sank on his shoulder, and she burst into tears as she threw her arms around his neck.

"I am here now, Nora, I am here now," he said, overwhelmed by her grief and pressing his lips to her bent head. "Now all can be changed; it is never too late for love."

"Oh, yes; too late, too late! The waves have closed above my head. Even you cannot save me. What is done cannot be undone. You have said that that hour trailed me in the dust. I know it. Now I am unworthy of your love; now I could not accept it. Go, Curt, leave me. Oh, why did you come?"

"To obtain what I now demand. My heart has known no rest since chance so wonderfully brought us

together, and when I again lost you. Now I *will* have an explanation ; no secret intrigue shall again separate us. You know that you were all, all to me, and in spite of all that man can do I shall make you mine. Nora, speak."

"No, no, you cannot. It is too late ;" she tore herself from his arms, and said almost breathlessly, "Some one is coming. Oh, that terrible man ! Go, you shall know all ; but now go, Curt—go."

"Why ?" asked Curt ; but there was a knock at the door, and at the same moment it was opened.

Landolfo entered, and a cunning smile overspread his countenance as he looked at the pair.

"Count Degenthal," he said, with a mocking bow. "Miss Nora, I have come for you ; it is time for you to appear."

"Thank you, sir ; my father always comes for me."

"Your father sent me for you. Had I known that you were in such agreeable company, I would not have dared to disturb you," he said, laying particular stress on *agreeable company*. "Probably your appearance can be excused if I mention to your father—" He stood near her, as if by right, and looked at Curt with impudent inquisitiveness.

"I will go myself to my father," replied Nora with dignity. "Count Degenthal, I fear we must now part."

She gave him her hand, which he clasped in his own, saying, "I shall go, for my time also is up ; but, Nora, I shall return, when everything shall be explained. Look for me in a few days."

He emphasized the words as if strengthening his own resolution, and at the same time impressing it on the man still standing there.

Landolfo answered by a disagreeable, ominous smile, which Nora did not seem to notice ; but there was a weary doubt in her tones as she repeated, " In a few days."

Curt hastened out, and threw himself into a cab. Although he had had no explanation, it seemed to him that a load was removed from his heart. He had seen her, spoken with her, and crossed the abyss which had separated her from him. He had read in her countenance that unfortunate circumstances alone had forced her to decide as she had ; she had called it a sacrifice, and he was convinced that a false sense of duty had alone influenced her.

Should he allow her to be torn from him because she had not had strength to overcome the circumstances ? The old feeling of boyhood, that he must be her protector, returned. Love overcame every other feeling. Yes ; in a few days he would return. Only those who have known the agony of doubt can understand his feelings.

He returned to his cousin, but did not find her alone. A broad-shouldered man in travelling costume, holding a Panama hat in his hand, was sitting by her, and he turned around as Curt entered.

" Dahnow," cried the latter, stretching out his hand, " old friend, where did you come from ?"

" Come back to European civilization from a little

three years' trip," said he, grasping the outstretched hand. "I intended to hunt you up before returning to my northern home, when I had given certain learned authorities here the benefit of my remarkable investigations. My inquiries after you and your family led to the discovery of your presence, and Countess Lily has had the goodness to receive me graciously. Now you have my *curriculum vitæ*. I never had very exhilarating news from you, old fellow—heard that you were sick; but now you seem quite recovered," said Dahnow, surprised at Curt's flushed cheeks and bright eyes.

"Curt," inquired Lily anxiously, "do you feel feverish? Has the ride been too much for you? I shall never forgive myself if it has."

"Do not be uneasy, little cousin," he replied, seating himself by her on the sofa. "It was a grand idea of yours. I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed everything, and how grateful I am to you, and all the day has done for me. No, I thank you," he added, putting aside the cushion which she reached him, but taking the hand that held it, and adding, "Dahnow, you do not know what a dear hand this is, and what an amiable soul she is. We men are barbarians."

Degenthal was reviewing in his mind Lily's loyal friendship for Nora, and how it had been the means of his meeting the latter. Lily blushed, and withdrawing her hand, said laughingly, "Do not talk such foolishness."

"He seems very much in earnest, countess," said Dahnow, looking at them both sharply. "Ah! it is

my fate," thought Dahnow, "it is my fate. Here, after three years, I come from the equator to find him again love-making. Poor Nora seems to be forgotten ; my letter did not bear much fruit. Well, perhaps this is more sensible ; but I wonder what has become of Nora."

Dahnow stood up to leave. To the urgent invitation of Lily, he answered, "In a few days I shall come to Göhlitz." Curt whispered to him, "Come soon, I have something to tell you."

"As though I had not guessed it," was the reply.

"I thank God the ride has done you good," said Lily, on their return home. "You seem strengthened. We must be silent as to the cause of our journey. I thank you for having accompanied me."

"It is I who should thank you," replied Curt. "What you did to day is a proof of your good heart. Lily, in a few days I shall tell you, and I shall count on your loving support." He would have added more, but Lily left him, evidently greatly excited.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN a few days ! It is pleasant to determine dates ; it gives a feeling of command of time ; and yet a *few days* embraces as much uncertainty as the far future.

“ In a few days ! ” thought Nora ; and although she had said, “ It is too late ! ” her heart fluttered with expectation and joy. He had come ! He was coming again ! His voice had trembled ! Had he at last understood ? Had love prevailed ? Nora would not allow herself to hope. Over and over again she determined to be strong and not permit him to make any sacrifice for her. But belief is so strong in the young heart that it is ever ready with its suggestions of possibilities. One thought filled Nora's heart with the purest joy. She could open her whole heart to him. She had no reason to shun his eye, and this made her tremble at the recollection of what an abyss she had lately stood by.

“ In a few days ! ” thought Curt, and he closed his ears to all considerations which fear, pride, and distrust whispered to him. After the first burst of emotion had passed, he made up his mind that he would not allow his love to be torn from him again.

“ In a few days ! ” said Lily, as she laid her golden locks on her pillow, and hardly dared express to herself all that she hoped for in the next few days. “ When he is once mine I shall nurse him back to good

health. He has grown better here," she said with pride. Some women express the happiness of love by "when he is mine;" others by "when I am his." A slight but characteristic difference. Lily was one of the former.

A few days after the trip of Curt and Lily to the city, the whole populace seemed to awaken from a nightmare, which, like all bits of scandal, was fed both by genuine interest and mere curiosity. Concerning as it did very well-known people, the matter in question kept the public tongue busy. It began on the evening of an especially advertised programme at the Karsten circus. The audience was already assembled in large numbers, when it was announced that there would be no performance "on account of the sudden illness of the director." The excitement among the members of the troupe, and the absence of Landolfo, who always represented the director, gave food for the wildest reports. It was whispered that Herr Karsten had had a stroke of apoplexy, caused by discovering the elopement of his daughter, or, as others said, his wife, with his manager.

The rumors took the wildest phases, from the gravest tragedy to the most absurd commonplace, according to the source from which they sprung. Some insisted that it was not the director's daughter but his wife who had fled. This, however, found little credence on account of the accepted relationship of the charming Nora to the manager; and besides, the wife's beauty was decidedly on the wane.

The daily papers were not behind in furnishing details ; and yet it was difficult to find cause for the elopement, for, as far as could be learned, there was no opposition to the engagement. Soon it was whispered that the manager had been found guilty of heavy frauds.

Some particular admirers of the director and some of those natural scandalmongers of which every city has its share went to the hotel where Karsten and his family stopped on a voyage of discovery. They failed in their purpose, for the entire family kept the strictest seclusion. The physician pronounced the director's condition very critical, or, at all events, threatening to be an illness of long duration.

As to the cause of the illness, the head steward shrewdly shrugged his shoulders, and hinted that there had lately been misunderstandings in the family. The chambermaid told of a scene which had occurred between the director and his daughter, and then she and the head steward smiled meaningly. The director was reported to have been in the habit of indulging in heavy breakfasts, which were trying to his constitution. If the director was tired, Landolfo used to be a good deal with the ladies. The porter remembered that on the memorable day one of the ladies, veiled and in travelling costume, came down-stairs with Landolfo, and entered a cab with him. Landolfo had on several occasions conducted the ladies to rehearsal. One evening there was great excitement upstairs, and the physician was called ; but ever since, as before mentioned, nothing could be learned, the wife devoting herself completely

to the care of her husband and son, not calling on the servants of the house for anything.

With these unsatisfactory details the newsmongers were forced to retire. The whole affair would have soon sunk into oblivion had not a new feature come to light, which was of particular interest to the most exclusive circles of society. One of the most universally read papers had an article which explained the elopement to its own satisfaction. It hinted at a three years old love affair between the pretty Nora and a certain well-known baron. The father of the lady had favored the connection in spite of the opposition of the D—t—al family, who left nothing undone to save the young heir from the net, even having him appointed to a distant diplomatic position. The father had been instrumental in arranging several meetings for the lovers. At length, as the baron's family had succeeded in completely breaking off the connection, it was decided to let the young woman adopt a public career, and to cease opposition to her marriage with the manager. Either through mortification at losing the noble suitor or through change of purpose, the pretty Nora consented and became engaged. After three years' absence Count D—— suddenly reappears, and declares anew his passion. The father's desire to see his daughter occupy a higher sphere awakens, and he dismisses his manager. The latter, however, insisted on his rights, and fled with his affianced. Count D—— had been seen in the hotel two days before the elopement, and was surprised by Landolfo in an interview with his intended.

The whole story was flavored with a mystery well calculated to whet the appetites of the readers. The probabilities and the improbabilities, even the inconsistencies of the fabrication, were second to the fact that the name of one of the first families was mixed up in it.

This ensured for it a field of conjecture, spite, and condolence.

The elopement story and the sudden departure and reappearance of Curt revived a rumor which had come from the banks of the Rhine. Mothers who had looked upon him as a desirable match now remembered his indifference to ladies' society, which never augurs good. The young men to whom he had been held up as a model laughed over the outcome, and made merry over Nora's supposed prudery. The older men put their heads together and consulted as to what steps to take when people offend society.

The world accepts readily and overlooks much as long as it can ignore, but revenges in proportion when it has to acknowledge. Many and various were the judgments ; some sympathized with the mother, while the lovers of scandal decided that there must be some truth in the story.

The news fell like a thunderbolt on the family circle at Göhlitz. The countess read of the elopement of Nora and Landolfo, and expressed herself as not surprised. She handed the paper to Lily, as a comment on the opinions so lately expressed by her. The latter was very much excited, and, with her never-failing

loyalty, exclaimed, "It is not true; Nora is too good."

"My child," said her aunt in an impressive manner, "years of such surroundings would change any one."

"But Nora is not changed," asserted the little friend. "It is an indescribable trial to her that she is obliged to follow this hateful career. It is only her love for her father that induces her to do it."

"How do you know?" questioned her aunt, fixing her eyes upon her.

Lily's cheeks turned a deeper red, but, with a full sense of her independence, she returned the look and answered, "Because I have seen her and spoken to her within a few days. It was for the express purpose of seeing her that I took that long ride with Curt."

"With Curt? You took Curt to her?" asked the countess, hardly above her breath, and the deathly pallor which overspread her countenance frightened Lily, who answered :

"Not to see her. I merely asked him to accompany me, because I did not dare confide in Miss Richthoben. It was only afterward that Curt knew whom I had visited, and he did not blame me."

"Did he meet her?" asked her aunt, somewhat relieved.

"No ; he escorted me to her residence without knowing, as I said, whom I wished to visit. I cannot see any impropriety in going on a little drive with my cousin, with whom I have been brought up, and appearing on

the street with him," said the little mistress of Göhlitz, in her own decided manner, as she left her aunt.

The countess was silent ; she was glad that Lily was sensitive on the point with which she had no intention of finding fault. She began to fear that the chaplain was right. Was all her management useless, and was it out of her power to control this matter ? It seemed impossible to save her son ; she would like to keep all the gossip from him, in order not to awaken old memories ; but she thought it best to let facts open his eyes, and serve as a corrective to the praises of Nora which he had been hearing lately. With this object she sent to her son's room the papers, where he could read for himself. "A cauterized wound heals the quickest," she said to herself. And, indeed, like a brand the news burned into the soul of Curt. He stared at the papers, and gnashed his teeth. He did not say with Lily, "It is not true." Want of confidence, nursed through long years, precluded this, and his love was mortally wounded. He was not overpowered as in time gone by ; he had grown used to sorrow and disappointment. Facts stared him in the face, and dashed to pieces the new-born hope and belief in her which had begun to return. Deceived again, baffled again ! Was this, then, the cause of her secrecy ? Was this the meaning of her words, "Too late !" which he had heard from her own lips ? He had seen this man enter her room as if he had a right. He had noticed his cold smile and mocking sneer as they parted. He recalled with what an expression of right this man had met her at the train. All

was explained now ; for a truth she did not exaggerate when she said that she " had sunken in the dust " if she acknowledged the dominion of such a creature. As for himself, he who had madly sworn to raise her, he who had put aside all public opinion and his own principles for her sake, was again betrayed.

He determined to hide all feeling of grief or humiliation. It seemed to him that every one could read the thoughts and actions of the last few days written on his brow, and scorned his weakness. Above all, he feared his mother's gaze.

When the countess inquired for her son, she was told that some important dispatch had called him away ; that he had gone on foot to the station, and would return or write in a few days. She was terrified, and wondered if she had acted inconsiderately. Lily's head drooped when she heard of her cousin's sudden departure. She wanted to make him the confidant of her troubles on Nora's account.

Another trial awaited the countess. The old diplomat appeared one day at Göhlitz with a serious countenance, and requested a conference. The man was one who looked unpleasant things in the face. Every article or even report which tended to make Curt's name public was studied over by him. The countess was perfectly helpless. Fate had indeed taken revenge on her. She had left nothing undone to prevent those two names being connected, and now she saw them brought together into publicity in the commonest way. She almost fainted as her old friend dwelt on each de-

tail, and was indignant when she read the papers. Her natural pride prompted her not to believe it, but the information gained from Lily left no shadow that Curt was in the city that memorable day. She had to acknowledge that at the first appearance of these articles he had left, and she did not know his destination. She was prepared for anything, and the old diplomat grew graver and graver. He promised all the power of his influence to hush the matter up, but he thought the young baron was, to say the least, very imprudent.

"All this comes from the excursions of independent young ladies," she said with evident irritation to her niece, having given up all hope of being able to keep the latter in ignorance of the universally discussed scandal. In the bitterness of her mortification she did not spare Lily's feelings, for she now looked on all as lost.

Lily listened to her aunt's words, and having read the objectionable newspapers through, said quietly, "But this is just as untrue as what they said about Nora. Neither Curt nor Nora would have done these things. Some one who wished to injure him has written this. As soon as it comes to Curt's knowledge he will, of course, deny it."

"God bless your little head," said the countess, impatient at the simple way in which Lily disposed of the whole thing. She herself knew the world better, and fully realized all the consequences. Her favorite "What is to be done?" presented itself to her mind. For the first time, Lily, too, had the same thought, incited by both love and pride. So Curt loved Nora!

Was this the cause of all his unhappiness and his long absence from his home, all his depression? But an unfortunate love affair always finds an echo in the true girl's heart. Lily's admiration for Nora's beauty and character made her understand Curt's sorrow, and the natural prudence which was so marked in her made her feel how impossible it would be for them ever to marry. She immediately began to plan how she could alleviate her cousin's grief and prevent him from again leaving his home.

She decided that the chaplain was the best person to apply to, as he knew both Curt and Nora so well, and indeed she thought it probable that the former had already gone to him. Each line of the letter that she wrote the chaplain was full of thoughtfulness and sympathy, while at the same time it betrayed the secret love which inspired both.

As the wounded animal flies to the solitude of the wilderness, so Curt sought to hide his sorrow in the quiet of his home. He had to pass through Vienna, and for a moment he was tempted to make inquiries concerning the newspaper reports; but no, they were too minute to leave room for doubt, and there could be no mistake concerning the movements of one so well known as Nora. Why should he remain longer in doubt? Had not her own lips confessed that it was "too late"? It was only his own mad passion that prevented him seeing it. What he had mistaken for love and loyalty was but bitter repentance, perhaps the last remnant of her former self.

The retainers at the old castle were surprised at the unannounced return of the young master, as they were looking forward to his triumphant return with his mother, after so long an absence, "entirely recovered," as the countess's letters loved to describe him. They all shrugged their shoulders and shook their heads as they looked at his pale face and received his cold greeting. Even to the chaplain he was reserved, and accounted for his quiet home-coming by asserting his dislike for excitement.

The chaplain, who had heard nothing of what had occurred, believed him suffering from a struggle with his own feelings, and judged it best to leave him to himself.

Curt spent hours alone in his room, or taking long rides in the country. The neighbors shook their heads, the servants wondered, and the chaplain began to doubt his own judgment, when Lily's letter solved the question for him. Although he placed as little credence as Lily herself in the newspaper articles, he was shocked beyond expression, and he knew enough of the world to thoroughly understand the disagreeable results of such sensational gossip. Deciding that it was time to speak, he sought Curt in his room, taking with him the mail which had just arrived. Curt looked over it indifferently, taking only one letter addressed in Dahnow's well-known hand. He looked anxiously at the chaplain, in whose face he read that he was withholding something. The latter handed him the offensive paper and Lily's letter.

Curt read the article through, and then his pent-up anger of days broke forth in a wild torrent of words, and he threw the paper violently from him.

"It is all right," he said, with a bitter laugh. "No one can touch pitch without being defiled. In my mad love I mistook rotten wood for a precious stone. It serves me right. He who walks with the low becomes low. And all this for a pair of languishing eyes! Laugh at me, chaplain; laugh at me as the rest of the world will; but you, too, have been deceived; you, too, expressed the highest respect for her."

"Curt," replied the priest seriously, "how much truth is there in the assertion that you met her? As for these base insinuations, Nora is as innocent as you."

"Innocent? Yes, she looked so horribly innocent that I did not even believe her own words. At least, she was honest enough to warn me that it was too late."

"Then it is true that you saw her?"

"Yes, I saw her," said Curt defiantly; "I sought her as soon as Lily had left her. I wanted to acquit myself of the reproach of having condemned her unheard; I wished to save her, and would have braved everything in the effort, she looked so pure and innocent. My God, how madly I loved her!" he cried out in agony.

"And that man found you there?" asked the chaplain, in his quiet way. "Then this article is but the fruit of hatred and envy. Curt, tell me all that occurred during the visit."

Curt related, in broken sentences, all that he remembered of his visit to Nora.

"She herself told you it was too late? She promised you an explanation, and requested you to leave? There is some mystery. God alone knows what drove the poor girl to this unfortunate step."

"Pretence, all pretence!" cried Curt bitterly. "This career was her taste from the beginning. My mother was right in prophesying that her education would only serve to make her a clever intriguer."

"Curt," replied the chaplain, with authority, "do not let your hatred be as reckless as your love. It is a serious matter to misjudge. When we think ourselves most secure, we are often in greatest danger."

He did not dare say more, fearing to awaken a love which he believed only slumbering, or a resentment which he believed unjust.

"Read your cousin's letter," he suggested; "then we can talk over the unfortunate matter, and judge what is best to do."

"My social position is destroyed," said Curt, with returning anger. "No matter how independent one may feel, no one likes to see himself generally criticised by his acquaintances"—and Curt saw in all its bearings the light in which his connection with Nora Karsten would be viewed. "My poor mother!" he murmured, as he thought with regret how he had received her admonitions.

"These are but slanders of which you are innocent," said the priest. "Do not go to Vienna for some time. Your health is sufficient excuse for your absence. By degrees this scandal will be forgotten. In the mean

time, I shall make inquiries, and contradict whatever is necessary. That man, I believe, was the writer of the article. Poor Nora !”

The good priest thought sadly on the apparent close of a life which had begun so brightly, until he almost feared being tempted to doubt Providence ; but the recollection of Nora's earnestness of purpose and the self-sacrificing motive of her action convinced him that she was innocent. “ Surely,” he said to himself, “ the poor child is being led through difficult paths, and her dying mother's prayer was not for her happiness, but her salvation. God's flowers grow in every soil.”

Curt remained in a painfully excited state of mind, and yet these facts, painful though they were, were easier to bear than the uncertainty of the previous days. He took up his cousin's letter, and as he read the simple, affectionate words, he murmured to himself, “ Loyal little heart.” Where he had given so much, he had received nothing but ingratitude and deception, while where he had given nothing everything was offered to him. “ Loyal little heart,” he repeated, as he pressed the letter, written, it must be confessed, in a very bad hand. Her amiable, even temper and well-ordered domestic life stood out in happy relief when compared with Nora's exciting, wandering career.

There are hours of weariness when the even, beaten paths please more than the most attractive landscape.

Next Curt took up Dahnow's letter, which ran as follows :

“I hope that my tardiness in acknowledging your and your amiable cousin's invitation will be excused. Indeed, I base my hopes on the belief that my presence was not missed. Unless I am very much mistaken, you are both in that state of mind which can dispense with visitors. Allow me, as one of your old friends, to offer my congratulations. I rejoice most heartily at your choice. Anticipating the formal announcement, old friend, I remain,

“DAHNOW.”

This letter seemed to Curt the supplement to his thoughts. The knowledge of being loved was sweet to his heart, and he knew that the announcement of his engagement to Lily would be the quickest means of silencing all this mortifying gossip.

“Loyal little heart,” he repeated once more, and his soul was filled, if not with love, at least with gratitude for Lily. And yet it was not Lily's eyes nor Lily's figure that were present to him during the sleepless night.

The next morning the chaplain was surprised by being handed a note from Curt, saying :

“I am starting for Göhlitz. There it will be decided whether I again go abroad. Pray for me.

“DEGENTHAL.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHILE all these scenes were taking place, a pale-faced maiden sat by the sick-bed of her father, who was lying unconscious, the victim of an apoplectic stroke. She only left her place to go into an adjoining room, where a lonely child pressed his little face against the window-pane, asking continually, "When will mamma come back?" Nora, whom the reader has recognized, took the curly-headed darling, whose likeness to her and to her father left little doubt of its identity, upon her knee, and consoled him with the assurance that "when papa recovered she would play with him, if he would only be quiet and good now; mamma would soon return." As she uttered the last words, her cheek flushed angrily.

Nora had anticipated what had eventually occurred, for she could not but observe the growing intimacy, inspired by frivolity on the one side and greed and revenge on the other.

Landolfo's deep-laid plans to become Karsten's son-in-law and partner being defeated by Nora's steady opposition, changed into hatred for the director, whom he always suspected of encouraging his daughter's feelings. By threatening to retire from the circus, Nora had induced her father to forbid any more of Landolfo's proposals. The latter began to pay attention to Ma-

dame Karsten, with the hope of exciting the jealousy of her step-daughter ; and the vain woman, who began to find domestic life monotonous, was very much flattered by the attentions of the acknowledged Adonis. She had gradually become weary of her husband in his advancing years. Landolfo was quick to recognize the possibility of making her a tool to further his own designs, and, as an additional means, he did all in his power to encourage Karsten's love of drink. His plans were somewhat hastened by Curt's visit, for he feared that the former engagement might be renewed, so he determined to bring about a result which would ruin Nora's prospects, and for which he felt sure the director's pride would prevent him seeking public redress. By threats and flattery he easily overcame the weak woman's love for her child, and having taken funds from the business treasury, the pair disappeared.

His thirst for revenge on Nora inspired the scandalous newspaper articles, into which he deftly interwove truths and untruths in such a way as to injure her reputation and Curt's.

Nora had had an angry scene that day with her father, who had been informed by Landolfo of Curt's visit. This had so excited her that she was totally unfit to appear that evening ; and this was made the foundation for the report of her elopement. Nora had retired to her room, and her thoughts were busy with the occurrences of the last few days, when she heard a heavy fall in the next apartment. Hurrying thither, she found her father lying unconscious on the floor, with a letter crushed between

his fingers. Karsten was going to escort his wife to the evening performance, when the porter informed him that one of the ladies had just left with Signor Landolfo. In amazement he proceeded to his wife's room, and there found his little son asleep and all the drawers and trunks lying open. A letter lay on the table informing him that "her heart could no longer bear indifference, and therefore she had fled to the arms of love. The domestic fetters stung her, and she had gone where her artistic talent would be recognized."

It required some time for the director to take in the situation, but once understood, his whole nervous system gave way, and he fell a prey to a second stroke of apoplexy.

As soon as she entered the room Nora understood all, and her first thought was to destroy all proofs of the humiliation and dishonor her poor father had suffered before calling for help. She hoped that he would speedily recover consciousness, but the doctor's manner soon convinced her that the worst was to be feared.

The following days she was entirely occupied with nursing her father, but soon other cares obtruded themselves. The illness of the director and the disappearance of the manager, together with the increasing mail matter, the wants of the business and the claims of the members of the troupe threatened a most serious complication. In order to prevent or at least to forestall any want of confidence among the troupe, Nora had the presence of mind to keep her father's unconsciousness a secret, and to put the direction of affairs in the hands

of one who had grown gray in the business, making it appear that he was acting under the direction of Karsten.

At first this arrangement seemed to promise well ; but as the defalcations of Landolfo came to light, and the want of funds made it impossible to pay the back wages due, the old man realized that it required more business talent than he possessed. Notwithstanding Nora's brave spirit, she began to despair. In vain she looked around her for advice or assistance, and she shrank from taking any decisive step, fearing the result.

How often that promise of "a few days" occurred to her ! But how slow they were in coming ! She impressed it on her maid that she must be very particular to tell her of any visits ; and on inquiry of any that were made, how disappointing to find only names that were indifferent to her !

In her desire for advice she thought of the chaplain, but a certain feeling of pride prevented her from applying to him. She wished to avoid the slightest appearance of approaching the Degenthal family. One day her heart bounded with joy on being told that a gentleman had called, but keen was her disappointment on reading on the card "Baron Dahnnow," and she was about to decline seeing him, when her eye fell on the pencilled words, "Should Miss Nora Karsten be in need of any service, will she call on an old friend ?"

Notwithstanding the first disappointment, these words were welcome, for she was indeed in want of advice and assistance. A certain feeling of repose came to her as she saw that sturdy figure, whose broad shoulders

seemed capable of bearing any burden, and whose clear eyes seemed ready to penetrate any mystery. Occupied as she was with her own thoughts, she did not remark the peculiar expression of his countenance as she advanced to meet him. He bowed low over her hand, which he raised to his lips. The mark of respect was pleasing to her wounded feelings, and she said, "How can I thank you, Baron Dahnow? How did you know that I was in need of a friend?"

Dahnow's explanation sounded very simple: that, being in Vienna, he had heard of her father's illness and hastened to make inquiries, as became an old friend.

It would have been a little difficult to have told her the exact truth. Just as he was wondering what had caused the breach between Nora and Curt, and what had become of her, he was attracted by the articles in the papers concerning her. He was quite unprepared for the sad occurrences enlarged upon, as he had never heard of her having appeared in public. He was completely at a loss to comprehend the whole thing, but notwithstanding this difficulty, he had never for a moment doubted Nora's complete innocence, or that it was the pressure of circumstances alone which had forced her to adopt the career.

The report of Nora's elopement he stigmatized as an "infamous lie," and his next impulse was to decide to go to Vienna and learn the truth. With his characteristic perseverance he overcame all obstacles, found Nora herself, and had the comfort of feeling justified in his confidence in her.

As he sat with her, he induced her to tell him her present troubles. His clear mind took in everything, and he promised her all the assistance in his power ; but Nora shrinkingly begged him " to avoid notoriety, not to let her be spoken of."

Perhaps it was the illy-concealed sorrow on Dahnow's countenance that made her conscious of how public her unfortunate condition had become. There is a good deal of the ostrich instinct in us all, which makes us feel safety in hiding our heads.

A new light seemed to break upon her, which made her ask in a quick, frightened tone, " Has this been dragged before the public ?"

Dahnow tried to evade by attributing the publicity to her father's reputation and to her personal charms. Her eyes grew larger and larger, as she said, " But how could they blame my father ?"

" They made a mistake in the names," said Dahnow, with embarrassment. " The little boy being left behind made people unwilling to believe that the mother—"

" Made a mistake !" repeated Nora. " No, oh no !" she continued, her face becoming a deep red. " It is impossible that any one believed that I—"

" Newspapers are so inaccurate," suggested Dahnow.

" But that must be corrected—that must be corrected !" she cried, wringing her hands.

" It was corrected. I read the correction in the best-known papers," said Dahnow.

" Ah, too late, too late !" she moaned. " Willing ears believe whatever bad is said about us." And for

the first time since her great misfortune, burning tears coursed down her cheeks.

"I shall do all in my power," said Dahnow, "to set things right, and to see that your name is protected."

He kept his word ; before many days the papers contained a clear, decided refutation of their former stories, and dwelt particularly on the presence of Nora at her father's sick-bed.

But Nora was right ; the refutation was passed over with the hurried, superficial glance with which news of little importance is read. Whether it was the wife or the daughter who had eloped was a matter of perfect indifference to the public, the charm of the gossip had passed. Those few to whom the truth or falseness of the story was of importance did not read the refutation. The circle at Göhlitz were not interested in reading the papers just at that time. As if by tacit consent, indeed, they were ignored, as if it were feared that the old wounds would be renewed or some unpleasant truth unearthed. Besides, every one was as busy as a great family event alone can make people, especially in this case, greatly desired yet hardly looked for.

Lily's countenance was beaming with joy. The darling wish of the countess was fulfilled just as she had begun to despair. Curt's engagement to his cousin was quickly known ; his return, as sudden as his departure, silenced the malicious tongues that had been made busy by his going away. True, meaning smiles passed over many lips, shoulders were shrugged, innuendoes

were indulged in, but congratulations came freely nevertheless.

The chaplain was the only one who made any inquiries and found out the truth concerning Nora, but under existing circumstances it was not practicable to speak to Curt or his family on the subject, and he had to wait for a more favorable time.

In the mean time, Dahnow gave his undivided attention to Nora's affairs. According to his opinion, the best course to pursue was to close the business as quickly as possible, and to have guardians appointed for Nora and her little brother, as, even under the most favorable circumstances, Karsten's illness would be of long duration. He advised going to Karsten's native town in the North, as greatly simplifying things.

Nora's countenance brightened when assured that the continuance of the business would only be injurious, for she feared that her brother's minority would require its maintenance. Now, however, she suddenly saw in her hand the end of what but a short time ago seemed an endless thread.

"How soon, how soon!" she asked, little dreaming that the *soonest* would be too late.

Yet an unconquerable opposition arose in her heart to leaving Vienna, where she had last seen *him*, where *he* had promised to "see her soon again."

An unspeakable restlessness seized her. He must come, he would come; he had come back of his own accord. Why should he have asked an explanation, if he were not influenced by the old love? Had not that

love sounded in each of his words? She dwelt on the moment she had rested in his arms and felt his kiss on her brow. He surely would come! She resolved to require nothing more of him. She would not try to tie him to her, but she wanted to explain all that had happened to her. She determined to take out the explanatory letter which she had written and show it to him, that he might the better understand how she had been circumstanced.

The letter lay waiting many days, but Curt did not come. Fears mingled with Nora's longing. Had her words offended him? Had he heard those dreadful reports? No, no. They would not have a word of truth for him! Had sickness seized him, as had been the case on a former occasion? The suspense grew harder every day to bear, and although weeks passed, and Dahnow called almost every day, she could not bring herself to question him. At length her heart's restlessness triumphed one evening when the dusk threw both countenances in the shade.

Dahnow had come to report what he had been doing, and to urge their leaving. She asked him if he had heard lately from his friend Degenthal. The words were simple, but each one trembled with emotion.

Dahnow turned pale. For weeks he had been dreading this question, for he concluded that all the reports and Curt's excitement had much to do in fashioning his course, and now he dreaded what he had to relate. He was glad of the twilight, which concealed his nervousness and helped him to say, with apparent indifference,

that Degenthal was well ; he had seen him after his last sickness, and found him much improved. They hoped that a stay in the South of France would effect his complete recovery. He was going there with his young wife. His marriage to his cousin was to come off in a few days.

The truth was out ! The good-hearted Mecklenburger wiped the cold perspiration from his forehead and kept his eyes fastened on the floor, so that he might not see the effect of his words. No sound came—no sound, no sigh. There was a long pause, one of those pauses when you can almost count the pulsations.

After a while Nora said, as she arose, “ I would not have thought it.”

When the heart is heaviest it seizes on the simplest words ; but there was a depth of disappointment in the sentence. Her cheeks were pale, and there was a wild light in her eyes as she said, “ I believe I must go to my father.”

She turned to leave the room, but her step faltered, and she seized the table for support.

Dahnow hastened to her, but she merely said, “ It is nothing. So much watching has weakened me a little ;” and as she raised her head with determination, the likeness to her father was most marked.

Dahnow looked after her entreatingly. The deep sympathy which was so apparent in his eyes moved her. Her lips trembled like those of a weeping child, as she said piteously, “ Baron Dahnow, did those reports sound so true ?”

He replied, "Circumstances concurred to give them the semblance of truth."

"But you—how did you know that they were not true?"

"Because I knew you I did not believe them," said the noble Mecklenburger in the simplest manner; but his voice trembled, and he seized his hat and left the room.

Nora hardly remarked that he had gone. "Because I knew you I did not believe it," she repeated; "and he—oh, *he* believed it!" she cried, as the tears trickled through the hands with which she had covered her face.

With the proverbial ingratitude of love, she was unconscious of him who had shown such implicit confidence, thinking only of the one who had wounded her. "He believed it all! I wish I were dead."

Baron Dahnöw wandered about aimlessly that evening, apparently indifferent to the thick autumn fog.

"She loves him still," he kept repeating to himself. "She loves him to-day, and were he to desert her ten times she would still be true. I always said he would bring her grief. She wasted her love upon this man, who does not know what love is."

Cold and weary, he sought his comfortable chambers, but could find no rest there. The pale, sad face was ever before his eyes, and the words, "But you—how did you know that it was not true?" echoed in his ears.

He sought distraction in what some call "the bad habit of reading," but to-day his store of books had no remedy for him. His lamp burned low while he was

still impatiently turning the leaves of his favorite poets. He took up a volume of Goethe, for Dahnow, even in travelling, always had with him whatever could in any way contribute to his bodily or mental comfort.

He opened at the passage where the immortal Goethe makes the uncouth Seckingen say, with more cynicism than poetry, of the gentle Marie, "The slighted maiden is ripe for a proposal."

Could it be possible that this was the opportunity for which Dahnow had been waiting? He threw the book aside, extinguished the light, and closed his eyes; but they must have been sweet dreams that visited him, for even in sleep a happy smile rested around his lips.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NORA felt this last blow even more keenly than her first great sacrifice. From voluntary renunciation to being forgotten and supplanted was a long, wide step, which she had not foreseen. It was a deeper humiliation than the cold contempt he had once shown her. Even in the latter there was a spark of love of which she never lost sight ; but now the last star which lighted the heaven of her affection had disappeared. She did not experience the wild agony which then rent her soul, but she was depressed by the despairing weariness which mocks the void of dead hope. Love and happiness are such essential parts of youth, that when they are taken away each breath of life seems unbearable.

But passion does not die with hope. Not in vain was Nora's power of loving awakened. The restoration of her lover had developed the dreamy sentiment of the girl into the deep devotion of the woman, which cannot be annihilated with a blow, but lingers like the dying ember and leaves the heart either dross or diamond.

Nora was obliged to hasten to the sick-bed of her father, who lay there a magnificent ruin, unable to move a limb or form a sentence. It was no help to her that he only required constant watching instead of active attention, for outward calm sits hard on the troubled mind.

In one of those hours of restlessness she wrote as follows to her old friend in the cloister :

“ I envy you your interior peace as I envy others their happiness. Why am I deprived of both ? What have I done that my love should turn to bitterness, and all my sacrifice be valueless ? Would that I could bury my heart with you, that your peace might annihilate all feeling.”

The good nun replied :

“ Child, this is no burial-ground. Did you not desire love ? To-day as then I do not blame your choice. Renunciation of the world, however, requires a strong and brave heart. Once you would not choose us ; now I could not choose you were you inclined to come. Oh, woe to us, rash children of men, woe to us when the Lord grants us our desire !

“ Did you not choose the struggle ? Did you not crave love ? To-day as then I do not blame you. It is man's right to struggle for life's joys and sorrows, and what the heart most desires is worth the strife. You knew the cost, and yet you welcomed love. Why do you complain ? Has the Lord been ungenerous ? He granted you life's changing fortune ; He gave you love in richest measure. Have you forgotten all the bright hours ? Even to-day, in the depth of your agony, I ask you, would you tear from life's book the feelings of the past ?

“ Child, worse shipwreck might have been your fate. Thank God that He did not allow you to lose your soul.

If your love was granted you as a saving medium, I congratulate you, and I believe that the day will come when you will bless the sacrifice it has cost. Look on your trial as a gift from God to you and to *him*. Why will you rebel against the God who has given you such proofs of protection, instead of putting yourself in His hands and trusting to His providence? If it seems to you that all your happiness is gone, remember that love is but one factor in earthly happiness. From a pure intention and brave resolve new blessedness may come. The heart's passion holds too small a place in the designs of God to allow it to limit life's object."

The wise religious who thus wrote must have possessed a clear insight into the female heart, so cleverly to mingle heavenly and worldly consolation.

Nora often asked herself if she would consent to let her present grief obliterate the remembrance of the joy that had been hers, and ever came back the answer, "No, no," as the blissful hours recurred to her memory. Again and again recurred the words, "It was a gift of God to you and to *him*." It seemed to take the sting out of the wound, and from her earthly grief she turned her thoughts to the providence of Heaven.

Winter had passed. Nora no longer opposed removing to the north, but the director's strength was not sufficiently re-established. Dahnow had gone there to make all necessary preparations, and to place the closing up of the business in proper hands. It was necessary for him to write almost every day to Nora, and these letters, so business-like and yet containing so

much, became a welcome interruption to her monotonous life.

It was spring before the final move took place. Dahnow had engaged a pretty residence outside the town, where the director could have good air and quiet, the most necessary things for him in his present state. The practical thoughtfulness of the young man had anticipated everything that could make it home-like. Violets perfumed all the rooms, and bloomed in the little garden.

A bright sun lent its rays to brighten the hopes for the future, and Dahnow could not help thinking of that April day when he first saw Nora in all her dazzling beauty. Like April weather, her life had been changeable ; happiness, warm and intense, had lighted it, and sorrow had clouded it. What would this new change bring her ?

Nora's eye brightened as she came in sight of the new home—home, home, entirely her own, where for the first time she would be free from the hateful surroundings of her father's business.

The past winter had been like a long, dark night to her, and she hailed the dawn of life and activity as one welcomes the gray morning light, not knowing what will be the day it ushers in.

The business had been wound up rather successfully. Notwithstanding the heavy losses of the last years, enough remained to secure to the director and his children an easy competence.

Karsten did not appear to realize the changes. Although much recovered, his old powers of mind and

body were far from being wholly restored. He loved to sit for hours perfectly quiet, or to busy himself in the little garden. Of the past he seemed to retain but slight recollection. Nora had feared the effect of his hearing of the close of his business, but when she told him of it he merely said, " Helena always wished it." There were days when he addressed Nora by her mother's name. He never mentioned his second wife, and was but little interested in his son. On one occasion, as the little boy, with child-like pleasure, thinking of his pony, mentioned the name of Landolfo, his father became so excited that it was hours before Nora was able to quiet him. She knelt beside him, and taking her father's clinched hands in hers, soothed him with trembling lips, until his angry eyes were finally closed in exhaustion.

The mission she had once proposed to herself of awakening her father from his religious indifference had been lost sight of in her own troubles. Blessed is the moment when the sense of duty to another gives us the means of overcoming our own grief !

Another help came hand in hand with this awakened sentiment. Life cannot be altogether dark when another devotes all his efforts to make us happy. Baron Dahnöw seemed but to live for Nora, and his care showed itself in the smallest things. To her great astonishment, she found that her riding-horse had been reserved, and on her suggesting that she considered it too expensive a luxury, he insisted that it was necessary for her health.

His watchful care was repaid by seeing the exhaustion, which was the natural result of so much trouble and anxiety, disappear, and noting the gentle exercise and fresh air bringing back the color to Nora's cheeks and the old expression to her eyes. Could he be blamed if all this new life revived new hopes in his heart? Would it not be possible that a new love might come?

Whatever may have been his thoughts, he never disturbed Nora's feeling of perfect confidence by exposing them. He possessed the rare gift of easily falling into the same vein as his companions, and now his quiet sympathy did for her what his former letters had done. Although yet too worn out to notice each little attention, she was grateful for his unwearying care, and day by day she grew more interested in his conversation. Although Dahnow may have lacked familiarity with many subjects with which she was conversant, he talked like an intelligent and well-read man, and his knowledge of her mother's country awakened her liveliest interest.

Notwithstanding she constantly showed how welcome he was to her, and he often thought of the words of the rough Sickingen, spring had blossomed into summer and summer had ripened into autumn before he had the courage to test the truth of the knight's words. Did Nora's eyes greet him with too little constraint, did she extend her hand too readily?

Was she really so wrapped up in herself as not to be conscious of the feelings which filled Dahnow's heart? Be that as it may, she was shocked when one day the

words were spoken with which a man offers woman what he holds most sacred, and he stood before her telling of feelings which had lain hidden for years.

It was only the surprise she felt which shone from her eyes.

"Think of all that the world expects from your scientific researches," she said.

Dahnnow merely smiled.

"Think of the difference of our religions."

He reasoned away the objections.

She dwelt on the duty she owed her father and her little brother ; she spoke of the place he could make for himself in the world ; she pledged him her everlasting friendship. He saw in her eyes the fear that she was about to lose her last friend, but alas ! he did not see what he looked for. Had he spoken too soon ? Had he left enough time for the wounds of old recollections to heal ? Well, he was a patient man. He could wait until she had become accustomed to think of another love.

"Let it be as though no word had been uttered," he said.

Nora placed her hand in his so trustfully, he felt how easily she could forget. He resumed his accustomed place in the little household. During the long winter evenings he entertained the director, whose recollections he seemed to understand how to awaken. He held the little boy upon his knees and told him funny stories, adding to them when he perceived that Nora joined her brother's merry laugh. To Nora herself he

brought books and pictures and everything which he thought would interest her, and she seemed to enjoy it all and gradually come out of her melancholy. One might think that when the heart gives up a ruling passion the mind becomes the gainer and grows more active. It is only in poor soil that roots cannot sprout again ; the richer the mind, the more easily does it recover.

Though youth is sweet and attractive, still more satisfying is the charm of developed womanhood, ready to follow man's deeper thoughts. Dahnow felt this truth as he sat opposite Nora, who never seemed so lovely as now, when the first deep sorrow began to disappear and was replaced by the quiet which follows the storm.

The day came, however, when, notwithstanding this charm, or perhaps on account of it, he became restless, and without other explanation than "I cannot come again," stood up to leave.

Nora sprang forward as though to retain the true friend, but suddenly she stood still, her hand pressed to her heart to still its beatings. She resumed her seat quietly, feeling that she had no right to burden him with her fate—him to whom she had nothing to offer, him to whom her heart could not turn.

Was she so perfectly satisfied with her present life? Ah! she felt how she would miss him, now her only remaining friend.

Dahnow's relatives found him so changed in appearance that they recommended him to try a milder climate.

One suggested that he might better get him a pretty wife to counteract the climatic effects ; and a sister, who had a large family and looked prudently toward the heirship to their uncle's fortune, said that " it was not intended for every one to marry, and that it was very evident that Clement was not so inclined. He should be allowed to do just as he pleased."

Dahnow did not go beyond the sea ; it seemed as if his unreturned love possessed a magnetic influence, which held him always within a certain distance of its object.

His leaving, however, made a great void in Karsten's home, where he had been the life of the little circle ; his absence made it necessary for Nora to still more forget herself to supply his place to her father and brother. This has always a reacting power ; the cheerful word uttered for others echoes in our own heart, and the bright smile sends back a reflecting beam.

Day followed day, and Nora could not conceal from herself that her father was losing strength ; but as his physical health declined his mental powers reasserted themselves. His thoughts dwelt on higher things. One day he expressed a desire to see a clergyman, and as Nora, in her joy, stooped to kiss him, he smiled, and placing a hand on her head, said, " Yes ; had I followed the advice of Helena in worldly and unworldly things, I would have been a very different man. Child, man can form his own fate, but he becomes the victim of its influence ; it transforms him. The hardest has been for you, my daughter. No," he continued, as she placed her hand over his mouth, " let me speak. It

has all troubled my head and lain heavy on my heart, although I have not spoken. I have destroyed your life's happiness ; things would have been different had it not been for my obstinate selfishness. Have I dreamed it, or is it true that he returned to you ?”

“ Yes, yes, he returned,” whispered Nora, and her eyes beamed with happiness.

“ Why did he not remain ?” asked the old man, his brow contracting.

“ Misunderstandings, misunderstandings, father ; it is better as it is.”

He gazed on his daughter, so beautiful, so innocent, so pure ! Of what place was she not worthy ? he asked himself.

“ Why cannot the misunderstanding be explained ? You are in the flower of life. It is never too late for happiness. What has become of him ? Where is he ?”

“ He is a long time married, father,” whispered Nora, and in spite of her strong will a deep red mounted to cheeks and brow. “ I told you, father dear, that it could not be otherwise,” she continued hastily, as if to remove the shadow of blame from her lover.

“ My poor child !” her father moaned, as he drew her head down to his shoulder. Suddenly he pushed her from him, and said, “ The other—where is the other ? You know, Nora, the one who came so often last winter. I could not think then ; my brain ached. I remember he came every day ; it could not have been for me, poor, sick old man, kind as he ever was to me. Nora, did you send him away ?”

"Papa, let me stay with you ; with you alone have I any comfort," interceded Nora.

The old man shook his head and said, "I shall not be long here with you. He was a good man, a true hand, a brave heart. It would be a great comfort to me not to leave you alone."

"God's will be done," replied Nora. "Father, even with him there was much to be considered."

"Yes, yes ; you are always the circus-rider's daughter, who can settle nowhere, that suits no one," he cried out bitterly.

"Father," she replied, "there is a sphere where we are not asked what we were, but what we are doing for a noble end. Perhaps God is leading me there."

"I do not understand," Karsten answered, "but do as you wish. My advice has already done you sufficient harm. But before I am called away send for the clergyman—you know whom I mean—he who stood at the death-bed of my wife. He may also help me. The last time I saw him I did not treat him well. He appeared like a spirit between you and me, reminding me of my dead wife's wishes, and I could not bear it. It was hard with us then, but I think he will forgive me. I must also have his advice with regard to the boy, that he may not fall into the hands of those people—not into their claws," he repeated, as he gnashed his teeth. "But I wish to die in peace with them, too. Nora, when I am no more, can you write my forgiveness to his mother. She was least to blame. Helena was right—in the midst of frivolity, what is to save us? That

you were saved was not owing to me. As for him," Karsten continued, "I forgive his rascality. He once saved me from drowning, and who knows but the failure he brought about has saved me from worse. Nora, the blow gave me you. Oh, what would have become of me had you not stood by me! You were right in saying it was for the best, in speaking of him who would have placed you in so different a sphere; it would have separated us. Now there is no such chasm between us; you are my prop, my consolation, my salvation. Child, your mother left you to me."

"Yes, it is well," replied Nora in a low voice, although her rebellious recollections protested. She pressed her face close to her father, threw her arms around him, and a sweet peace stole over her heart. Now she understood the reason for her sacrifice and saw its rich fruit.

The feelings of father and daughter were sacred at this moment. Helena's influence seemed to be over him. In that hour the lifelong wanderer found peace, and felt the reward of the sacrifice he had made many years ago, parting with his child in order to fulfil his vow to her mother.

According to Karsten's wish, the chaplain was sent for. Not a moment did he hesitate on receiving Nora's letter, but hastened, like a trusty friend, to receive Karsten's last words as he had received Helena's, and to assume once more the protection Nora seemed now to need as much as when a little child. In this character, when the last rites were over, he asked her about

her future prospects. At that moment a letter was handed to her, in which she seemed buried. As she raised her eyes tears hung on the lids, but her expression was firm as she said, "This letter is an answer to your question. You can hardly believe how full of love and truth it is."

"From Baron Dahnow?" the chaplain asked, and a tone of uneasiness sounded in his voice.

"Yes," she replied; "Baron Dahnow heard of the death of my father, and in this grief comes to offer me love and protection with his hand and name."

"It is an offer worthy of his noble character, but requires to be considered," said the priest, with evident hesitation. He knew well in what an equivocal position circumstances had placed Nora, and he fully understood what marriage with a man like Dahnow would be to her.

"No," she replied with decision; "it is not to be considered. But such a proposition enables me to be sure of myself. All that once seemed so sweet to me has lost its charm. The tree that has once been withered by such a storm does not bloom again; but, thank God, it is not dead, and can still spread its branches." She spoke in low tones, as if communing with herself.

"I do not quite understand you," said the chaplain. "There are unselfish hearts that are happy in giving love without exacting it in the same proportion, and to many a woman's heart this is happier than to mourn for the deeper feeling."

"I thank God for the consideration," she cried, interrupting him, "and were it not that the voice of duty

forbids it, I would gladly—oh, so gladly, reward such loyalty with my whole life ; but not even the tenderest love can silence that. No ; I shall have no more divided duty.”

“ And yet,” said the chaplain sadly, for he did not dare advise, “ it would be such a comfort to know you were hidden in a safe haven.”

Nora raised her beautiful head dreamily, and repeated, “ A haven ; yes, such a marriage would be a quiet, retired haven. Do you honestly believe I could be happy there ? I am my father’s own daughter. Restless blood courses in my veins that longs for action. If I was willing to undertake the struggle for worldly things, let me now do so for higher.”

“ Beware of forming morbid resolutions,” warned the priest anxiously. “ When the heart has experienced disappointment it is apt to fancy it has nothing more in life.”

“ But I have to do with life,” she said, while a sad smile played around her lips. “ I am going to live in earnest. The time has passed when I would have been willing to bury my heart. Now if it cannot have its desires, it will have its duties. Do you not believe that the Lord has still strength and work for me ?”

She rose up and stood before him in the full beauty of her womanhood, and from her eyes shone forth an enthusiasm far from morbid indifference.

“ And the little boy ?” suggested the priest, pointing to her brother, who stood at a distance.

“ My first duty is toward him, and I shall try to fulfil

it. I shall find him a new home on the other side of the ocean with my mother's people. He shall not want for love or protection. There he can more easily find a successful future, and there I shall find a field for my labors. Baron Dahnow's account of his travels in America has filled me with enthusiasm for the New World, where there is much to be done. However, that is for future consideration. You, my best friend, will help me to make the change, as you did to make a crucial one long ago."

The priest reached out his hand to her, saying, "You have undertaken much. For the third time you have chosen strife and struggle. The Lord is, indeed, guiding you by strange ways. Your mother desired nothing for you but your salvation, and I believe her wish is to be consummated. All your desires seem to tend that way. May God's blessing be upon you. You have been sorely tried."

"Is there but one May-time in life?" she asked.

A short time after the scenes here described a young couple entered a hotel at one of the South German mountain resorts, coming from the south of Europe. The lady's whole attention was absorbed by a young baby, who had been born in Italy, and whom they were bringing by slow stages to its colder German home.

The gentleman appeared rather wearied by the mother's absorbing anxieties. Notwithstanding his natural paternal pride, he availed himself of the first opportunity to escape to the terrace, which commanded a grand view of the setting sun and red, purple, and golden

clouds. His attention was directed to a second tourist, who had seated himself at a little distance on the terrace with his back toward him. Something in the figure of the latter seemed so familiar that he approached him, and suddenly exclaimed, "Is it or is it not? Dahnow, surely you cannot travel *incognito*! How happy I am to see you!"

"Ah, Degenthal!" said the other, turning his face toward him, but the tones of his voice betokened no particular joy.

"Yes, it is I," the first replied, "on my way home with my wife and child after three years' travel. But what is the matter? How are you feeling?"

"Probably like any one who has received the glove for the third time."

"The glove, Dahnow, you handsome, dashing fellow! Impossible; from whom?"

"From Nora Karsten," replied Dahnow, looking angrily at the former friend of his youth. It was an unfortunate meeting between one who loved and one whom he believed to be the cause of his refusal. "Yes, from Nora. He who possessed the pearl cast it away, and no other hand will she accept."

"From Nora Karsten," repeated Degenthal reservedly; "from her whom Landolfo—"

"It is easy to believe what we want to believe," was Dahnow's answer as he turned his back. But Degenthal turned him round, crying, "What do you mean? What was there to believe? What was not true?"

"The foulest lie that ever was uttered, to have

connected the name of such a girl with such a rascal, such a being with such a hound ! Whoever believed it, wished to believe it. If you do not already know it, let me tell you, it was her step-mother who ran away with the manager, leaving husband and child. To shelter themselves, the despicable pair laid the blame on Nora, and every one believed the lie."

"That is impossible, impossible !" cried Degenthal. "With my own eyes I—"

"You read just what I read," said Dahnow scornfully. "But I, who never tried to steal into her heart with fine phrases ; I, who never swore to love and protect her, did not believe it. I knew her too well. She stood too high to connect her with such calumny. The first inquiry explained all. Did I not warn you," continued Dahnow, with increasing warmth, "that circumstances would be stronger than your love ? Then was the time for you to withdraw ; but you seemed true, and, by heavens ! she was worth it ; but when the trial came you barricaded yourself behind an untruth. Do you want to know how I found her ? At the sick-bed of an unconscious father ; none with her but the deserted child ; her reputation smirched on your account ; no one to help her, no one to stand by her. I did all that a man can for the woman he venerates, but I could not win one thought ; she was ever true to you. I saw how her love for you had robbed her life of every joy, strong and patient as she is. I scorn the man who blights a woman's life ;" and shaking off Degenthal's hand, which rested on his shoulder, he walked away.

Degenthal remained alone. He did not answer a word to Dahnow's denunciation, but the icy feelings of yore gathered around his heart. For three years he had enjoyed a certain amount of peace and happiness ; for three years he had repelled every thought of Nora, and rejected any doubt of her guilt which presented itself. But now—

The voice of his wife interrupted his thoughts. "Curt, Curt, I beg of you to come here. How can you stand there gazing at those old mountains while our beauty is here ! Only fancy, he notices that he is in a strange place. He will not go to sleep unless we change the position of his bed—he is so cute ; come help."

Curt went obediently. In a dreamy way he took his boy in his arms, admired him, and wondered at his cleverness, as his wife and the nurse expected him to do. Patiently also he changed the bed, but there was something in his manner that made Lily say to the baby, "Send papa away, darling ; he hardly looks at you, and is only happy with his mountains and his cigar. You men are so heartless !"

Curt did not defend himself against the accusation, but kissing his first born, went out, for he felt he could hardly breathe in the room.

When passion awakes in the heart even the smile of one's own child has no power to soothe. The fresh air seemed to have but little effect, the summer evening was without charm. From time to time he groaned as if in pain. Was it the arrow of truth piercing his

heart? "*He believed who wished to believe.*" Had he been willing to believe?

The moon had sunk behind the hills, and Curt was still on the terrace, when a hand was placed upon his shoulder. Dahnow stood before him. It was not the moon's light that made both men look so pale.

"Degenthal," the latter said, "I come to say farewell. Forgive what I said. It was wrong in me to disturb your happiness. There are hours when the devil takes possession of men. Let us say no more on the subject. Words do no good. It was to be. You did not mean to be dishonorable. She was not meant for either of us. Perhaps it is for the best."

"Where is she?" asked Degenthal, and the words could hardly be heard.

"Karsten is dead. She is going to her mother's country," replied Dahnow. "Let all be buried. I do not like to leave you in enmity. This evening I go away. Farewell, Curt. Be happy in what God has given you."

"Where are you going?" asked Degenthal, taking the outstretched hand.

"Where? The world lies open to the homeless man, but the migratory bird returns to the nest where it was hatched. The day may come when I shall return to the old home in the north."

"What will become of you?" asked Degenthal, who seemed in a maze.

"What will become of me?" repeated Dahnow. "Perhaps I shall be an enigma to my friends, and then

an agreeable surprise to my heirs." But the would-be cynic could not conceal his sad heart. The word passed unheeded, but became a prophecy.

After many years of travel Dahnow returned home, took a small house near his relatives, and buried himself in his scientific researches. His house was a model of refined comfort, where he always had a welcome for a circle of pleasant people. He had spoken truly when he described himself as "an enigma to his friends." Many, indeed, wondered that a man of his domestic tastes did not marry, but he obstinately repelled any overtures in that direction. The "pleasant prospect to his nephews" seemed more and more sure as years went by. At one time, indeed, the prospects seemed threatened by the appearance of a fine-looking young American, bearing a French name, who placed himself under Dahnow's protection. He was anxious to become acquainted with things in Germany, seemed to look on the baron's house as a sort of home, and remained there several months. The stranger appeared to be so dear to Dahnow, that many of the relatives wisely shook their heads; but they were satisfied when it became known that the young American had large possessions in his own country, and was not to be feared as a prospective heir. There was a good deal of speculation, however, as to the cause of the interest which Dahnow manifested in him. The latter kept his own counsel and smiled to himself. The young man, who, with true American independence, quite enjoyed his position, and who showed more taste for the horses and dogs than for the scientific pursuits

of his host, could throw no light on the matter, unless he might ascribe all the kindness he received to a letter of introduction which he brought with him.

Perhaps it was a name which he so often mentioned, the name of one who, with characteristic generosity, had given him the greater portion of her fortune, or a certain resemblance of feature and expression which won him so warm a place in the noble heart of Clement Dahnow.

CHAPTER XXV.

ONCE more we return to the garden of Göhlitz, with its sunny terrace and August wealth of bloom. The sun is shining brightly on a happy company. Graceful young figures, playful groups of children, men and women in the prime of life, make the air echo with joyous laughing and chatting.

A family feast was being celebrated at Göhlitz, the birthday of the head of the house, the old lord, as Curt Degenthal had been called since his eldest son married and became the father of children. Each of these anniversaries saw a constantly increasing family circle.

Curt and Lily had remained loyal to Göhlitz. After their return from the south the young married couple settled down. He could not bear to be the cause of interfering with his mother's long-cherished dominion, and Lily was more than pleased to remain where, since her majority, she had wielded an undisputed sceptre.

When the advancing years of the countess made care too oppressive Curt's eldest son was of an age to assume the responsibility of his grandmother's property, and, besides, Lily was pleased to see her son come into possession of property, and influenced her husband to further the idea.

The old countess had seen all her dearest wishes accomplished. Her son had married the heiress whom

she allotted to him since their earliest childhood. It was a happy union, for Curt always showed his wife the tenderest care, and they were blessed with a numerous family. Lily's fortune had adorned the high station of the Degenthal family, and the proud countess had the satisfaction of seeing her grandchildren make distinguished alliances. Yet Providence in the very granting of our blind wishes may allow the thorn to grow, which is all the sharper for being of our own planting.

By his union with Lily the countess had, in one sense, lost her son, her heart's idol. It is only the noblest nature that is generous in material as well as ideal things. Lily was not a noble nature; she was narrow both in mind and heart. She was not willing to share the love of her husband and children with any one. She could not acknowledge any other influence, even the sacred claim of motherhood. True, she did not propose to cause any unfilial feeling, but knowing what a powerful influence his mother always had on Curt, she kept them apart and estranged them by those hundred and one tactics so well known to the female mind.

Curt's natural indifference, and certain recollections which he could not separate from his mother in former days, prevented him offering any resistance. A sad and lonely old age for the countess was the consequence.

Did the remembrance of a certain pair of dark, loving eyes and a sweet, sympathetic voice echo in her mater-

nal heart? "A daughter worthy of you in mind and heart," the nun had said.

When the chaplain had done justice to Nora by repeating her story and trials, the countess's high sense of honor could not refrain from honoring and admiring the heroic courage of the circus director's daughter. Her own loneliness made her all the more highly prize Nora's filial sacrifices. The thought *would* come, how different might it have been with her had she had such a warm, unselfish heart near her. How such a mind would have stimulated that of Curt, now grown inert and, through his wife's narrow jealousy, shut out from intercourse with men of intelligence; so different from the promise of his youth. She sighed gently, but was far from remorse; she had done what she thought right, and would regret nothing.

Time had dealt gently with Lily. The stout little woman did not trouble herself with matters outside her own immediate family, and there all had gone well. The desire of her girlhood satisfied, the cravings of her weak nature asked no more. Curt belonged to her unreservedly; that satisfied her.

As she leaned to-day on the arm of her eldest son, whose fair face resembled her own, she looked proud and happy. She had eyes and ears for him only and for his plans, which had her warmest sympathy. Her first-born resembled her in everything; the others had inherited their father's tall, slight figure and the commonplace intellect of their mother, with the exception of the second son, who had his father's brown eyes and

thoughtful forehead, as well as his more aspiring nature, tempered, fortunately for him, by some of his mother's more practical bent. Before he had reached his eighteenth year he decided to devote his life to the sacred ministry, and entered an order devoted to foreign missions.

Sadly Degenthal bade his boy farewell, but he always scrupulously studied the happiness of his children, and in the matter of their vocations even opposed, when necessary, his absolute little wife.

Secretly Lily consoled herself for the choice of her second son by the idea that it would enable her to give more pecuniary means to the elder.

Father Degenthal's calling had taken him to the New World, where he had now been absent several years. He remained tenderly attached to his family, and never failed to unite by letter with them in their home festivals.

Curt had withdrawn from his children and grandchildren to read the letter which had been brought to him from his favorite son. He sat in his study, which opened off the drawing-room and looked upon the terrace. The vine-encircled window was a tempting place, where the noise of the company in the garden would not disturb him. He sought the light in order to read the long and closely written missive. To his surprise there was a second letter enclosed, bearing no address. He put it aside in order to devour the lines from his son.

As he sat there, with the warm sunshine falling on his fine head, he was even a handsomer man than in youth.

He had a fine figure, and though his hair had many silver threads, it was thick and luxuriant, and his full beard was very becoming to his earnest countenance.

Since his meeting with Dahnow, long years gone by, he evinced a certain lack of interest, which was attributed to his rather delicate health.

A thoughtful husband, a loving father, and a kind master, he had governed his household well, but more by example than words. It was only in his literary pursuits that the old-time enthusiasm could be recognized.

It was only when his increasing family unconsciously imparted youth to him that he was tempted from the seriousness which had settled on him to such an extent that people asked what could it be that made Degenthal so completely bury himself in the bosom of his family.

To-day, however, as he read his letter new life seemed to return. The blush of youth mounted to his cheek ; with an impetuosity long foreign to him he threw his son's half-read letter aside and seized the one enclosed. He tore open the envelope ; a number of newspaper clippings fell out ; he did not notice them, but seized the small, yellowed sheet within. This he gazed at as if it were an apparition. It had evidently travelled far, for it bore many postmarks. The address was almost effaced, but showed a lady's hand, evidently written under excitement, and beneath were words he knew but too well, as he had once written them himself.

Years had passed—years which had left their sting in his life, since he in bitterness had received this very

letter, and had sent it back unopened with its contents unread, the ignorance of which had destroyed his life's happiness.

His hand now trembled as he broke the seal. Big tears filled his gray eyes and hung on his long lashes, as he now read the words that had streamed from the breaking heart of the writer—words that told of the sacrifice which filial duty had exacted, words that said farewell, but echoed a cry for help.

The old man's head fell on his breast, as if the woe of those days welled up anew from his heart. Bitter came the thought of what might have been.

He blamed others, and yet he had to confess how cowardly his own conduct had been.

As a resistless avenger the old love arose from its grave. He saw again the lovely maiden, who had been all to him, in the springtime of her youth. Was not that the vine-shaded window that looked out on the beautiful Rhine, the nook where their two young hearts spoke vows of love and sympathy that were to last through life and eternity? Was he looking into those blue eyes that mirrored a soul ready to make any sacrifice for him, and for which he was offering all and everything? Did he dream of the time when he risked all for the mere bliss of holding her once more in his arms?

Again he saw her as in all her sorrow she stood before him, purity in her form and love in her eyes, as he dared doubt her and again left her unprotected—easily believing what he wished to believe, were Dahnow's words.

The bitterest sorrow known to man rent his heart. He had thrown away his happiness, he had lost his ambition and his love, and embittered his youth. The gray-haired man felt his life a failure and his heart a ruin. He swayed to and fro, and the name, not uttered for years, sprang to his lips—Nora, Nora, as though it could recall life and love.

Suddenly he started as if the invoked name had answered, but it was merely a knock on the window-pane, and a curly head appeared and chubby hands were clinging to the cornice. "Grandpa, grandpa, take me or I'll fall! I knocked and knocked, and you did not hear me," said the baby voice of one of the youngest of the guests.

The complaint awoke the grandfather from his dreams. He hastily lifted the little one, who clung to him, and the baby embrace warmed his heart. The child of his child was the ambassador that made the present bury the past. "The child of my child," repeated he to himself, and the words banished the visions of youth. What had he to do with early love, surrounded as he was by another generation? With the boy folded in his arms, he looked out on the gay groups outside. His wife, who had been true to him; the children she had borne him, and who honored and perpetuated his name; the home which had been so peaceful, and which to-day smiled on him in its autumnal abundance—was all this nothing? Could he complain of life that had given him so much? But in the midst of the group he saw standing the spirit of lost happiness. It looked from

cloister bars, from which he had rescued it in youth. Had she found life's path too thorny? Had the absence of love and home blasted all hope, and did her broken heart accuse him?

Curt turned away from the merry company, and for the second time seized the letter that spoke to him of his youth and love, all the time keeping the boy on his knee, as if with the hope that he would exorcise the bitter thoughts.

His son wrote as follows :

"I must relate to you an occurrence, father, the key to which you perhaps can furnish better than I, much as I am interested. The enclosed letter, which was confided to me, will tell you all and explain of whom I write. You know that the house of our mission here is but a small one, but we have received valuable assistance from a community of nuns near by.

"I have heard on all sides of the difficulties encountered by the Mother Superior when she founded the convent. She was a woman of wonderful nerve and will, and in her order was generally selected for difficult missions on account of her great talent of organization. Her former home was in this neighborhood. For ten years she has now labored without ceasing for the education of the children, the spread of Christian knowledge, and the care of the sick, and is spoken of by all most highly for her holiness and benevolence. I was delighted one day to be sent to her on professional duty. As I gave my name to the French portress she mispronounced it, as only a French woman could; but I had

hardly come into the presence of the Mother Superior, a woman of noble presence, and who must have been wonderfully beautiful, when she said to me, in the purest German, before I could explain my business, 'You must certainly be a Degenthal. The likeness is unmistakable. You have your father's eyes and forehead, and look just as he looked at your age. The tone of your voice is the same. I knew your father very well. Is he still living?'

"You may imagine, father, how delighted I was; it is such a joy in a foreign land to meet some one who has known the dear ones at home. I had to tell her everything about you, mother, and the family. She appeared to have known grandmother and the chaplain, and inquired for them.

"I had to enter into every particular of your life, and I told her how you made every one belonging to you happy by your care and affection, and of the pleasure you derived from your studies.

" 'Yes,' she interrupted, as if speaking to herself, 'he always had a noble nature and a bright mind.' Her speech and whole bearing convinced me that she must have belonged to the most refined circles. Perhaps you may remember her. I had occasion to see her often, and each time my admiration for this remarkable woman increased. This all occurred last winter.

"In the spring one of those terrible epidemics which sometimes visit us, and which strain every nerve, came upon us. This noble woman was untiring in her exertions, and her practical talents worked miracles among

our terror-stricken people. The sick and the poor honor her as a saint, and her presence in their homes seemed to give them new courage. The city made public acknowledgment of her services. Other cities, visited by the plague, called for her, and when her duties here allowed, she hastened to the assistance of other houses of her order.

“Often she was obliged to make those journeys on horseback. I met her frequently, and was struck by the equestrian skill shown by her, most remarkable in a woman of her age and in a nun. When I once made some remark on the subject, she laughingly said she had been accustomed to riding in her youth, ‘and now it is good for something,’ she added.

“About that time I was sent to a mission which detained me from home for some time. On my return the awful plague had spent itself, but I was grieved to hear that the terrible strain had broken down the noble nun, and she was very ill.

“I received a message that she wished to talk with me, and I immediately went to her. She received me with her usual warmth, but I was shocked to perceive the change that had taken place in her appearance.

“She lay in an invalid-chair in the convent garden, and a lay sister sat beside her.

“‘You see what I have come to,’ said she, ‘and how I have to be waited on. However, I have not sent for Father Degenthal professionally ; I do not stand enough in awe of him for that,’ she added in a jesting manner ; ‘but I want a favor of him, if he does not think me too

frivolous. Will you bear a message from me to your father? We were good friends for years; an unfortunate accident brought us together as children, when your grandmother was very kind to my parents and to me. Later a misunderstanding, for which neither of us was to blame, separated us, and the possibility of an explanation did not come. I am unwilling to die without it. Meeting you seems to me the finger of Providence. The Lord does all things well. Send this letter to your father,' said she, giving me the enclosure; 'he will know who sends it, and when he understands how all occurred perhaps he will judge differently from what he did in those days.'

"The tone of her voice was sad as she spoke, and a flood of recollections seemed to overwhelm her. She ceased speaking, as if buried in thought, and remained so long silent as to seem to have forgotten my presence. Suddenly she opened her eyes with that indescribable expression peculiar to her, and continued, 'You see how even an old nun can cling to things of earth, and concern herself with them in her last days. In your youth you will, perhaps, wonder at this. Old age is so far away from you and such an unknown land that you can hardly understand the feelings of its inhabitants; but human nature is human nature to the last breath. This we understand when years have passed and seem so short as scarcely to have separated us from youth.'

"She spoke as if to herself, but each word had so much meaning that I try not to forget one.

" 'I want to send your mother greeting also, the

greeting of a school-girl's friendship. I have long known of your mother's happiness. Once she was loyal to me, which I have never forgotten. God has rewarded her for it by sending her such happiness.' She hesitated, and then said, 'But I have also been happy, very, very happy. Tell that to your father. The life the Lord has sent me was beautiful, and I was true to it to the end. What He gave me in my youth was sweet; He guided all for the best, and we have all followed the paths laid out for us as though we had chosen them. The Lord sends no sorrow without its consolation, no cloud without its sunbeam. I thank Him that He led me into His service; that He made me useful to many—perhaps one home would have been too narrow for me; I thank Him that He gave a home to the homeless and that He sent you to me to receive my last adieus.'

' "She took my hand and continued, 'I am happy to have met you. Be thankful, young man, that God has called you to His service in your youth; we mortals sometimes wander into by-paths.

" 'But,' she continued, 'the conquest is all the better for the struggle. Don't you think so?' she asked, smiling. 'That is a comfort to many a struggler; but you are right, God is the best leader. Now tell me of your mission. I am tired of idleness, and if you have time I would like to hear of the activity of others.'

" I told her of my work and its results and promises. She listened with sympathetic interest, and her quick perception and ready grasp of each particular showed how eagerly she had entered into her vocation. It

made me understand the meaning of her words that *one home might have been too narrow for her.*

“As I told her of my plans she said, ‘I may not see it; they are going to send me to the mother house on account of my broken health. It is a sacrifice to give up my work here, but, as it has been said, I do not take root anywhere; I belong to the wanderers. Yet I would like to have rested here, where my mother’s home was.’

“By this remark I understood that she was an American by birth, and I cannot connect her acquaintance with you with it. She must have had a varied life, for she knows almost all the European languages as if they were her own. When I had to go I expressed a desire to see her again, but she looked at me thoughtfully and said, ‘No, my young friend, let us take leave now. Your mission demands all your time, and my last days must not trespass on it. I said that human nature remained human nature to the end. I have given it its rights; now let my thoughts be directed upward. It was very kind of them to let you come. What I have done will perhaps be of good to others. Come, take the blessing of an old woman, for you, for him, for all his house,’ she said in trembling voice, as I bowed my head and her hand rested upon it. ‘Just so did my mother bless your father. I repeat it, it was a blessing that our paths crossed.’

“These were the last words that I heard from her, and each one is written on my soul, for they seemed to me a legacy to you, my father. Her last wish was ful-

filled, for her illness increased so rapidly that the journey to the mother house was abandoned. A few weeks after our last conversation she died, regretted by all, rich and poor. Whatever her rank may have been, she could not have received more honor than was shown to the humble nun. I can never forget her ; it is a blessing to have even met her, who had a heart so warm and a soul so worthy of heaven."

So wrote the son with all the enthusiasm of youth, and the old man read it with a feeling of mingled thankfulness and sadness, acknowledging that what seemed bitter had borne blessed fruit, and that even the shortsightedness of man tended to the accomplishment of the designs of Providence.

The little boy, who had grown weary of being unnoticed, touched the letter with his baby fingers and said, " Is it not ended, grandpapa ?"

" Yes, darling, it is ended," continuing to himself, " ended like all things here below—youth, love, and life—but *it was well ended.*" He could not say, as she did, " It was better so ;" but he said, " It is good so." He rose and felt as if a weight had been lifted. " Yes," he said, " she was right, her blessing did others good."

The little grandchild wondered to see his grandfather collect each piece of paper and gently lay it aside. The old man smiled as he recollected how he had once spurned this same time-worn letter, and how a strange fate had brought it back to his hands to be honored.

Secret drawers have a wonderful charm for children, who connect everything uncanny with them, and the boy raised his little head curiously and mounted a footstool, to see what his grandpa had laid away so carefully in one of these mysterious places in his desk.

Carefully Curt laid away the letter, and then from the drawer he took a little pearl heart, which he fastened to his watch-chain. The morning that that little pearl heart was placed by childish hands on his chain came before him as clearly as if it had been but yesterday. Again he saw the dying mother and heard her agonizing words ; again he heard the chaplain accept the sacred charge.

Impatient feet and loud voices broke in upon his dreams, and a happy crowd burst into his room, saying, " Papa, as one messenger could not bring you out, we have all come. Richard and his letter must not keep you from us any longer."

His wife also came, and looking sharply into his face, asked, " Was it a good letter ?"

" Yes," said he, " it was a *good* letter ;" and his kind face beamed with delight on the merry crowd surrounding him.

" Then why do you stay away from us when we are all so happy ?" asked Lily reproachfully.

" Our son sent me news of one from whom I never expected to hear again—sent me a greeting, a last greeting. But we will have many happy days together," he said, as he drew her to him. " God has granted us

many blessings—He has done all things well. Nora, the circus director's daughter, also sends you greeting. She was more than happy, she was holy."

"God's flowers grow in any soil."

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